

SAB Homes

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Victorian makeover

Heritage home morphs to open modern



The renewal of this 125-year old small Victorian home presented a typical challenge in Toronto – altering and updating the existing residential urban fabric while preserving the historic character of heritage neighbourhoods.

JIM TAGGART

The intent of the renovation of this narrow semi-detached residence was three-fold: to provide increased living space without enlarging the footprint of the house; to maximize the amount of natural light; and to reduce the environmental impact of the house

The interior layout was opened up to connect the house both in plan and in section, which in conjunction with expanded window openings, washes the formerly dark interior with natural light. The design connects the indoors with the outdoors, allowing an awareness of the changing seasons to pervade the interior. As a result, the house gives the impression of a space far bigger than its modest 215 square metres.

The re-design explores new approaches that expand the boundaries of traditional living space in a historic context where a narrow conservationist aesthetic often prevails. This project challenges these notions with the understanding that houses were not built a century ago for the way people live today, and demonstrates the positive impact of substantially renovating rather than building new.

While the integrity of the traditional Victorian two-storey street facade is preserved to reinforce the neighbourhood's historic

Credits

• Architect/Designer: Dubbeldam Design Architects • Project Team: Heather Dubbeldam, Tania Ursomarzo, Katya Marshall, Heather Ross, Katrina Touw • Contractor: Troke Contracting • Photos: Shai Gil



FAR LEFT: CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN TORONTO, CABBAGETOWN COMPRISES THE LARGEST CONTINUOUS AREA OF PRESERVED VICTORIAN HOUSING ANYWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA. TO MAINTAIN THE HERITAGE CHARACTER OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, THE STREET FAÇADE WAS LEFT LARGELY UNTOUCHED. LEFT: IN CONTRAST, THE REAR ELEVATION IS UNCOMPROMISINGLY MODERN, WITH A RECTANGULAR FORM AND LARGE WINDOWS.

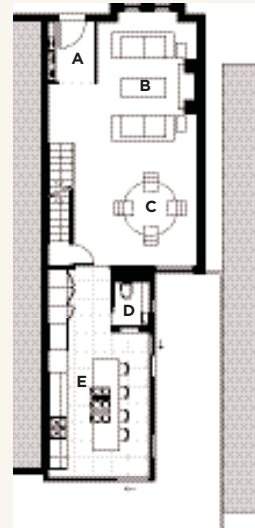
character, the rear façade and cleverly positioned third floor master bedroom addition, are boldly modern. Termed 'two-face' by area residents, the house is a study of contrasts - old and new, Victorian and modern, discrete and bold, brick and glazing, peaked and flat, outside and inside - that together form the basis of a new approach to renewal in historic neighbourhoods.

An increased flow of light, an improved line of sight, and the incorporation of sustainable technologies and materials were key requirements of the owners, an oncologist who works in a clinical setting and an environmentalist. A couple with a contemporary attitude but with a limited budget because they wanted to ensure that they would be able to recover their investment should they need to sell in the short term.

An energy audit determined that the house had significant air leakage, lack of insulation and an inefficient heating and cooling system. The house has been designed to incorporate a number of energy-saving features. Passive sustainable strategies were used to minimize environmental impact, while remaining sensitive to cost. The new design incorporates an open staircase without walls, allowing adjacent rooms to feel larger and more connected, and altering the air movement in the house.

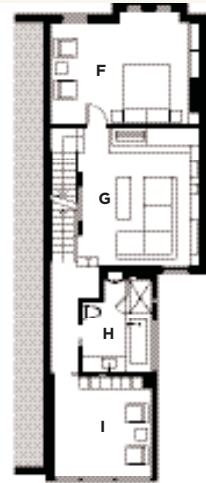
A long skylight above the open stairwell draws natural light down into the heart of the house, significantly reducing the need for artificial lighting. In conjunction with new operable windows, it also creates a stack effect when open, allowing for passive natural ventilation throughout the house.

In addition, the south-facing rear of the house maximizes passive solar gain in cold winter months. During the warmer months, [article continues on page 22]



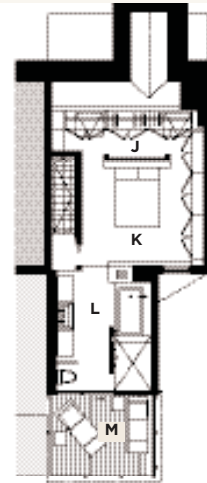
Ground floor

- A Vestibule
- B Sitting room
- C Dining room
- D Powder room
- E Kitchen



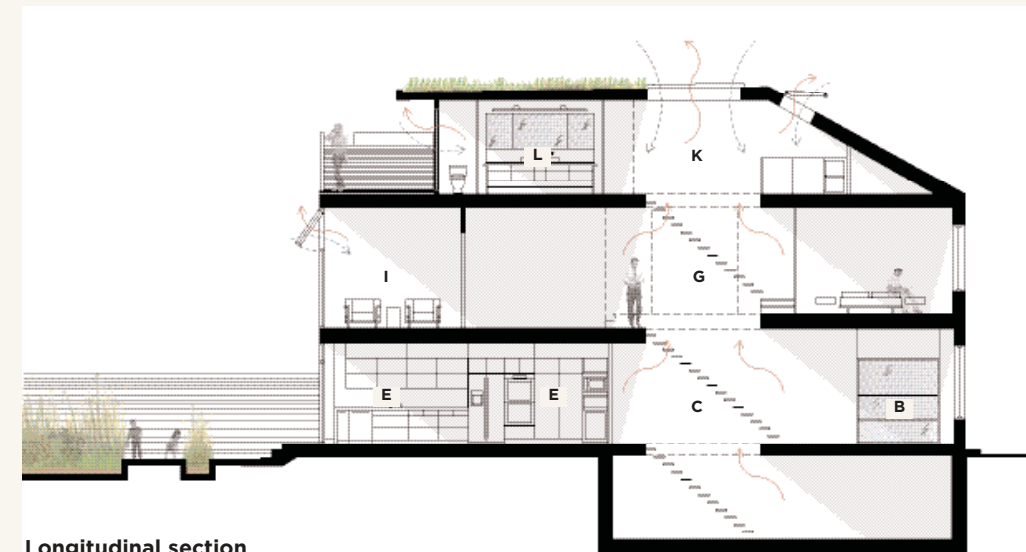
Second floor

- F Bedroom
- G Entertainment room
- H Bathroom
- I Library



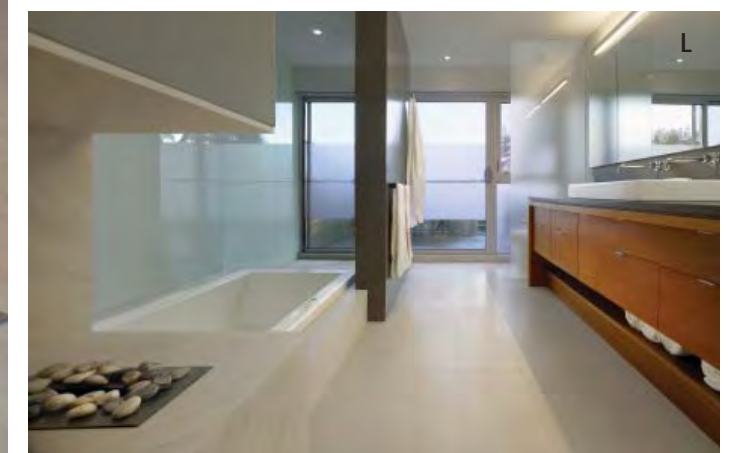
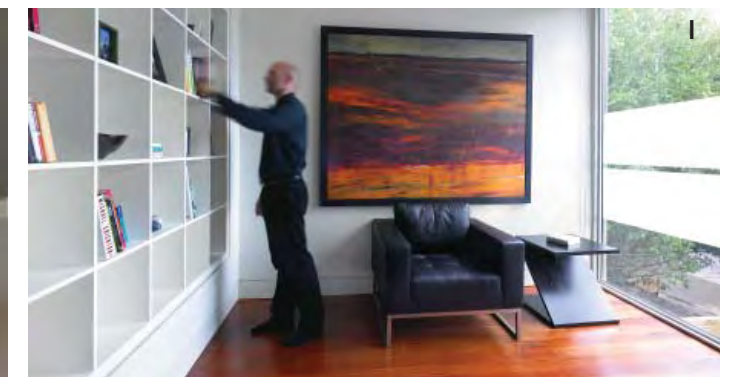
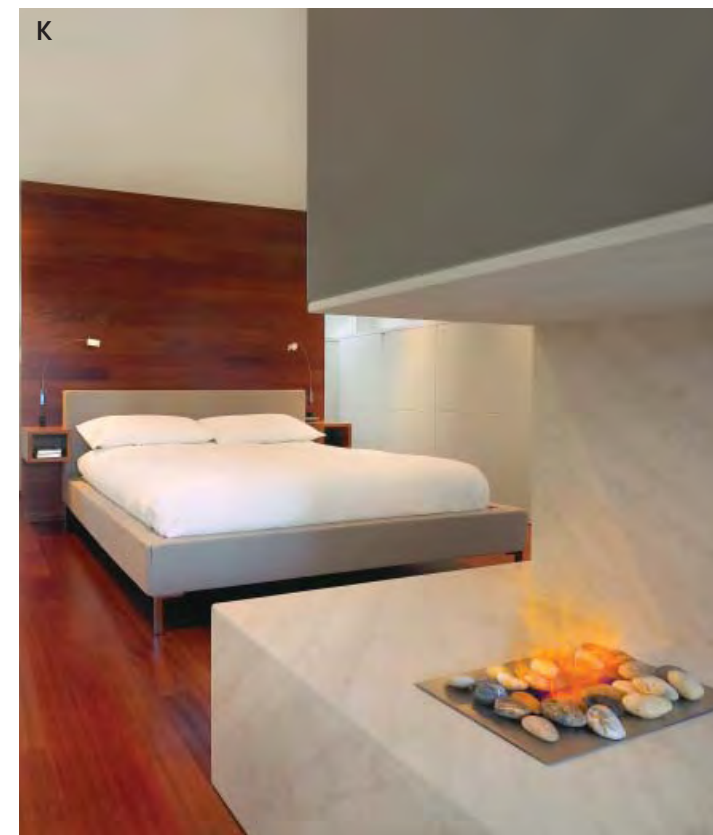
Third floor

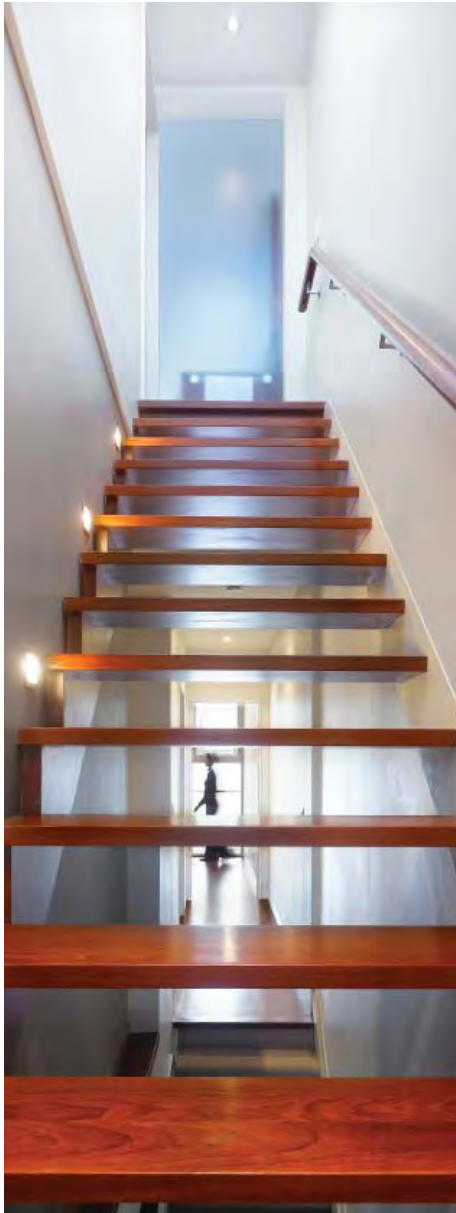
- J Dressing room
- K Master bedroom
- L Ensuite bathroom
- M Roof deck



Longitudinal section

BELOW LEFT: ROOMS ARE OPENING TO THE CENTRAL STAIRCASE, ADDING TO THE SENSE OF SPACIOUSNESS. BELOW AND BELOW RIGHT-LOWER: THE MASTER BEDROOM SUITE IS LOCATED IN THE THIRD FLOOR EXTENSION. THE CLEAN LINES OF THE BUILT-IN FURNITURE EMPHASIZE THE FLOW OF SPACE. BELOW RIGHT UPPER: THE SECOND FLOOR LIBRARY IS NATURALLY LIT BY A FLOOR-TO-CEILING SOUTH-FACING WINDOW





deciduous trees and operable blinds help to regulate temperature and allow for visual privacy. A ductless air conditioner in the master bedroom on the third floor lets cool air sink through the house.

Energy systems and fixtures were upgraded to high-efficiency models, old windows were replaced with larger, low-e double-glazed units, exterior walls were insulated, and renewable wood products were used throughout.

The project was completed on a limited budget thanks largely to the creative adaptation of standard building systems and elements. In the kitchen, IKEA cabinets were matched with marble counters and backsplash, and a few

custom-designed elements to give the kitchen a sophisticated and completely customized appearance. Neutral colour palettes were selected throughout to make the narrow space feel lighter and to accentuate artwork and unique furniture pieces.

Two years after moving in, the owners are already seeing a return on their investment in lower energy costs, improved comfort levels, and a significant jump in the market value of their home which now exceeds the original purchase price and renovation costs.

Demonstrating the merits of re-using and refurbishing existing buildings and addressing the challenges of working with an existing build-

ing and a tight budget, the design demonstrates the value of 'greening' old buildings. ❖

JIM TAGGART, MRAIC IS EDITOR OF SAB HOMES.

LEFT: AN OPERABLE SKYLIGHT ABOVE THE STAIRCASE BRINGS LIGHT DEEP INTO THE HOUSE, AND FACILITATES NATURAL VENTILATION THROUGH THE STACK EFFECT. RIGHT: THE KITCHEN HAS GLAZED PATIO DOORS THAT CREATE A STRONG CONNECTION BETWEEN THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE SPACES.