

# SPACE RACE





# Renovating to make a space feel larger was the mission for this team

BY *Connie Adair.*

PHOTOS BY *Aaron Mason*

**F**inding a new home isn't easy, especially when you don't want to leave your neighbourhood. The solution? Turn your old house into a new one.

The owners of this mid-Toronto home searched for a couple of years to find a larger house more suited to their family. Although it was ideal when their children were small, it no longer worked for the couple and their two older teenagers, Amedeo Barbini of Barbini Corporation says.

"We couldn't make it bigger but we could make it visually bigger by manipulating the focal point and materials used," he says. He and interior designer Vanja Stephanek came up with a plan to transform the home, which is 810 square feet on the main floor, into a beautiful, open and functional space that would be suited to family living and entertaining. It would also make use of every inch.

The original home was compartmentalized into small rooms. A few steps led down to an addition built by a previous owner. "It was discombobulated," Barbini says. "The living room at the front was small and they didn't use it. The dining room was too small for their family."

The mom said the children would come home and run to the basement. She'd never see them. She wanted a family-friendly home where they could eat together, but also entertain, says Stephanek, who is part of Barbini's design/build team. "They wanted an open concept but still wanted to have some areas defined. In this project we maximized the space in terms of storage/ functionality for the family and their lifestyle so they didn't require additional square footage that is costly and time consuming to build," she says.

Main floor walls were removed and wood and steel beams used to create the open plan. The placement of the beams slightly lowered the ceilings in the middle of the house, where the kitchen area was to be built. Stephanek turned the utilitarian





## Sheen makes a difference

Colour was used to create visual interest, definition and depth. The walls and kitchen ceiling were painted with Benjamin Moore Revere Pewter and ceilings are White Dove. "By using the same colour on different surfaces in a different finish/sheen, we achieved that open feel that the clients were after while still creating a subtle interest to each individual area of this open concept. This delicate difference of the same colour made the built-in units pop just enough to create variety, while the overall space was still harmonious and balanced," Stephanek says.







bulkheads into a feature, Barbini says. “Vanja’s approach was to hide the beams in a coffered ceiling.”

The ceiling defines the space horizontally, while floor-to-ceiling cabinets define the space vertically.

To create continuity and balance, the same finishes and colour palette were used to tie the whole space together. For example, the same dark wood is used on the kitchen island and the bookshelves in the living room.

“The use of the dark wood cabinet in the living room creates a focal point that incorporates the TV/surround sound system and defines the room while still maximizing storage,” she says.

The unit has thicker shelves and flat doors. The desk area on the opposite wall has



bookshelves on either side. It was designed to be more subtle while still providing an office area, she says.

The fireplace in the former living room (now the dining room) was retained because “the owners very much enjoyed it especially when they entertained because it added warmth and ambiance to their space. The mantel was changed to make it work with the transitional look of the new design. To accommodate their need for storage, two symmetrical built-in units were added to either side.”

“Adding detail is another way to make a space feel bigger,” Barbini says. “It creates a tapestry of visual elements,” Stephanek adds.

Wall-to-wall cabinetry, with shelves above and closed storage below,

#### OPPOSITE TOP LEFT

The kitchen island is large enough to seat four and the stools tuck well underneath to save space.

#### OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT

Utilizing a wall with shelves, cupboards and a desk is a space-saving option alternative to a home office.

#### OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT

The recessed areas of the kitchen ceiling make it much more interesting than if it was flat.

#### TOP RIGHT

A combination of dark wood and white kitchen cabinetry complement the medium tone hardwood flooring.

#### MIDDLE RIGHT

The fireplace in the former living room (now the dining room) was retained because it added warmth and ambiance to the space.





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serves to make the space appear larger. Everything was custom made for the space, she says.

Must-haves for today's living, included the addition of a closet in the entry way, a pantry, main-floor powder room and in-floor heating.

The dining room was moved to the front of the house and the living room to the back. Windows and glass doors were enlarged to deliver more natural light into the main floor, and to meld the interior and the backyard.

The kitchen gathering spot is in the middle, Stephanek says. The owners love to entertain, so including a massive island made sense. Ample storage and appliances were added, from a cappuccino maker to a gas stove, to provide a comfortable, convenient and beautiful space.

Always one to find clever uses for space that would otherwise be wasted, Barbini inserted glass shelves at the end of the wall that houses the front hall closet. The client couldn't picture it, but now that it's built, she loves it. She uses it to display family heirlooms, Stephanek says.

About two-thirds of the second floor was renovated, including both bathrooms. The en suite bathroom space existed, but was enlarged slightly and the location of the fixtures changed, Barbini says.

The vanity, with twin sinks, is centred under an existing skylight. A soaker tub, a steam shower and heated floors are creature comforts.

The master bedroom has a closet, and within that closet is one devoted to shoes, Barbini says. Right from the get-go, contractor and designer worked with the homeowners to create their dream home. "Vanja was involved from beginning to end, helping choose materials, colours, the size of features such as the island," Barbini says.

Their involvement kept their clients from becoming overwhelmed. By offering guidance, they say they helped the client get from ideas to finished product. "They were involved and helped in all the decisions. We wanted them to feel like it's their home, not something that was done for them. It has to pass the acid test for good design" he says. **HC**

#### LEFT

In the master bedroom, the enlarged opening to the bathroom makes the space in both rooms seem larger.

#### BELOW

The en suite bathroom was enlarged and includes a soaker tub, steam shower and heated floors.

