

Refining a gem

This naturally bright home in the city attracted these homeowners

BY *Connie Adair*. PHOTOS BY *Aaron Mason*

"Our friends asked if we are in the witness protection program because we move so much," homeowner Mary Lee Keefe says.

She and her husband Guy Manuel roll "with the life stages" buying and selling homes to meet their family's needs, she says. They most recently sold their cottage because their grown up children no longer had time to spend there. So, it was important that this house had a cottage-in-the-city backyard with a pool.

The couple bought this 3,500-square-foot house in 2014, choosing a location close to their old west Toronto neighbourhood. "We didn't want to move to the suburbs but wanted a bigger lot," Keefe says.

They concentrated their efforts on renovating the approximately 1,600-square-foot main floor and backyard. Rather than gut the space, which had been renovated over the years, they refined it. Glass half walls were removed to open up the space and create an easy-for-entertaining flow.

Ceramic tile inserts in the hardwood floors in the 18X15-foot foyer and the kitchen were removed, matching wood was installed and the floors throughout sanded and stained a darker brown.

Eighteen-inch crown mouldings were added around coffered ceilings in the



ABOVE

Marble was used for the counter and backsplash for a seamless look.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT

A cozy nook with a table is ideal for a quick meal.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT

Mouldings in the ceiling add character to the living room.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT

A painting on the dining room wall adds a pop of colour to the space.

When I'm sitting at the island, sometimes I almost need sunglasses

living and dining rooms for drama. Pot lights were installed in the living room.

Mouldings were attached to existing basic flat doors in the foyer (powder room, closet and door leading to the garage) because they were “not the least bit interesting,” Keefe says. Instead of adding mouldings the usual five or six inches in from the edges, they were placed two inches in to give the doors a feeling of grandness, says Amedeo Barbini, president of Barbini Corporation of Toronto who renovated the home.

Walls around the stairs to the lower level were removed and replaced with glass railings.

The dysfunctional kitchen needed the most work. Half the kitchen has a two-storey ceiling and half is regular height. An extra row of upper cabinets (with lights inside and frosted glass doors) were added

on one wall where the ceiling is two storeys high. That wall of cabinetry includes an integrated fridge and double ovens.

A row of lower cabinetry, with windows above, runs along another wall. The lack of upper cabinetry on this side creates an open, airy feeling.

A beverage centre is tucked into space under the staircase landing that leads to the second floor. Six-inch-deep upper cabinetry with frosted glass doors offer a place to store glasses, while a counter below provides just enough space to pour drinks. A bar fridge and wine cooler are tucked under the counter.

Identical looking cupboard doors flank the beverage centre. Although it looks like its two-door counterpart, the pantry on the right opens as one door to reveal an eight-foot-deep, walk-in pantry. The

Unusual Island

A must-have for the owners is the large island/breakfast bar. Barbini added a light canopy that mimics the shape of the island and suspended it from the ceiling with piano wires.





ABOVE
The pool is popular with everyone — including Charlie, their 14-year-old dog.

BELOW LEFT
The barbecue gets its own cabinetry made of the same decking material for a seamless look.

wasted space under the stairway landing was put to good, and surprising, use. Rather than stacking a second row of upper cabinets above the cabinets on the beverage centre wall, the space was left open so anyone descending the staircase behind it can see into the kitchen. Marble was carried from countertop to backsplash around the room to create a feeling of intimacy, Barbini says. As a finishing touch to tie the space together, narrow bands of wood are carried horizontally around the room. When it comes time to sell, the kitchen will provide the ‘wow factor’, says Keefe, a real estate agent. “I know what people want.” However they bought the house for their own enjoyment, not as a resale project. “One thing that attracted me is how bright it is,” she says. “It’s difficult to find an older home that’s bright. It has skylights and is south facing. When I’m sitting at the island, sometimes I almost need sunglasses.”



Built-in cupboards in the adjacent eating area were removed and the owners opted for a smaller table even though the space could have accommodated a larger one. The dining room has enough space to add two big leaves to the table to accommodate their big family or guests at frequent dinner parties. The renovation ensured that every inch was usable and that every part of the house is well used in every way, she says. “We’re pleased because we didn’t want a rambling house we didn’t use.” The couple lived on the second floor for the approximately six-month interior renovation. The exterior was phase two. Three double door walkouts at the back of the house lead to the deck. The living room and kitchen open on to the same deck and the family room has its own staircase down to the patio. The private deck provides enough

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ABOVE

The homeowners plan to install glass railings on the deck for safety and unobstructed views.

space for a large sectional and a built-in barbecue that was finished with the same wood as the deck. The work areas to either side of the barbecue are finished with honed stone.

The deck, which Keefe says looks like hardwood floors and is soft underfoot, is made of thermo-treated ash. It is fastened from underneath, a time-consuming project with an incredible result. Rather than staining, it just has to be oiled, Keefe says. Glass railings were added around the deck for safety but don't detract from the view from the seating area to the pool.

The interior finish of the pool was originally white, which made the water look turquoise. The refinished pool has darker blue cement that makes the water look royal

blue, a more natural look, she says.

New stone work was installed and a horizontal slate cedar fence built for privacy. "The fence is low key and disappears into the background," Keefe says.

Inside and out, the project was a success, because, she says, they picked the right contractor.

"Amedeo constantly reviewed the project. He provided paperwork that said what they did, the cost, the variance and why." Even better, this project came in on budget.

Barbini credits the relationship he has with his clients as key to the success of any project. "They were wonderful to work with." 