



SIMPLY MODERN

Thanks to online tools like Pinterest, Houzz and Instagram, designing a home has never been easier. See how one Toronto couple built their dream house by collaborating with an architect – and the web

BY EDEN BOILEAU AND KATIE UNDERWOOD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIAN RICHARDS



STAIRS ARE THE IDEAL PLACE TO MAKE A BIG DESIGN STATEMENT

↑ TREAT YOUR STAIRCASE LIKE A WORK OF ART

These days, you can pretty much outsource everything to the web. Grocery delivery? Check. Pet adoption? Absolutely. Designing your dream home? That too. So when partners Kavita Joshi and Nikki Gersh bain set out to turn a rundown Toronto duplex into a warm, modern landing pad for their newly blended two-child household, they looked to the internet for inspiration. “Building our house became a metaphor for creating our family,” says Nikki, a lawyer and the more design-savvy half of the duo.


To start, the couple enlisted Kavita’s brother-in-law (and design builder) Dean Ruffolo to help design a layout for the space. Then, armed with a modest wish list, Nikki began browsing Houzz, an online aggregator of interior design ideas. Houzz allows DIYers to create ideabooks – similar to boards on Pinterest – for both design minutiae and broader decor schemes. Users can also connect with designers, which is how Nikki initially spotted the work of Toronto architect Wanda Ely. ▶

Nikki felt overwhelmed by the idea of designing a staircase on her own. So she searched for ideas on Houzz and created ideabooks before turning to architect Wanda Ely for advice. “Even though she took inspiration from the images, it was totally her own design, and it was perfect. We didn’t need her to change a thing,” Nikki says. “It saved us a lot of time and money to find the inspiration online, in one place.”

WALLPAPER, ETROWALLCOVERINGS.COM.
ART, JUREK DENISLUK.

After seeing photos of one of Wanda's projects, Nikki emailed her to ask if she'd consult on a few aspects of the space. "I could see they had great taste and were very organized," Wanda says. "I felt comfortable that the foundation was there to create something fantastic."

Nikki set to work creating individual idea-books for many elements of the overhaul—lighting, flooring, even the baseboards—and Kavita gave the picks a final pass. Wanda's job was to integrate the features into a warm, modern and, most importantly, coherent scheme. In the end, the scope of Wanda's involvement expanded from consulting on the staircase and main-floor finishes to encompass the kitchen and two bathrooms as well.

For Kavita and Nikki, using Houzz was a cost-effective way of finding inspiration in one place, but the interplay between online wizardry and an architect's skilful eye resulted in their home's contemporary feel. "These [sites] function as forums that allow people to explore and validate their design choices," says Kavita, who is a social media expert by trade. Whether eating breakfast at their kitchen island or enjoying movie nights in their den, Kavita and Nikki are revelling in the fruits of their "webspiration." "We feel like we accomplished what we set out to do and more," says Nikki. "We built a home for our family." 



HITS OF
YELLOW PULL
THE SPACE
TOGETHER

← CUSTOMIZE OFF-THE-SHELF STORAGE UNITS

A jigsaw puzzle of big-box-store cabinets was customized to create this bespoke entryway, complete with a comfortable spot to put on shoes. Teak panelling stretches over the ceiling to create an intimate atmosphere.

TILE, STONE-TILE.COM. HARDWARE, RICHELIEU.COM. LIGHT, UNIONLIGHTINGANDFURNISHINGS.COM.

↑ CREATE A FOCAL POINT WITH A SALON WALL OF ART

Nikki and Kavita maximized the seating area in the cozy living room at the front of the house by adding a wall-to-wall sectional and two lounge chairs. A blue-black wall allows their eclectic collection of art to take centre stage, creating a focal point. The repetition of black from the window frames to the accessories throughout the house grounds the space and ties it together.

SOFA, SIDE TABLES, WESTELM.COM. CHAIRS, THEBAY.COM. COFFEE TABLE, SHELTERFURNITURE.CA. FLOOR LAMP, STUDIOPAZO.COM.

SEARCH FOR DESIGN INSPIRATION FOR YOUR STYLE OF HOME

"Houzz was key in helping us identify and refine our style," says Nikki. "I had a file of clippings I had saved over the years from magazines, but most of those images were of Victorian or century homes. In the end, very few of those clippings were helpful because we didn't have a house that looked anything like that." Kavita adds, "Wanda was instrumental in pointing out that there was a disconnect between the images we were showing her and the house we had actually purchased."



Homeowners Nikki Gershbain (far left) and Kavita Joshi with architect Wanda Ly (right).



↓ MIX DIFFERENT WOODS BUT MATCH THE UNDERTONES

Wood-panelled walls were central to the design of Nikki and Kavita's house. "We needed a big-picture design anchor and I felt this was it," says Wanda. "I saw how the nostalgia of wood-panelled walls really resonated with Nikki and Kavita." Their collection of mid-century furniture and the white oak floors have similar warm undertones, and that's the key to working with different wood types in an open concept space.

LIGHT, MORBA.MYSHOPIFY.COM. CHAIRS, MYDESIGNREPUBLIC.COM. ART, PARTSGALLERY.CA.



PINTEREST

We love this site for its limitless inspiration. Use it at the beginning of a project to get your creative juices flowing: Pin everything that makes your heart race, then narrow down your absolute favourites and put them all into one board. Refer back often, especially when you find yourself going astray.

HOZZ

Part online store, part inspiration bank, part resource for finding designers, Houzz is perfect for saving the nitty-gritty details about your project. Create ideabooks for everything

↑ SOFTEN A MODERN KITCHEN WITH TEXTURAL ACCESSORIES

Kavita describes Nikki's style as "an eclectic mash-up of contemporary and mid-century modern, but with a lot of warmth and personality." High-gloss white kitchen cabinets paired with Hans Wegner-inspired stools and a colourful Persian runner perfectly illustrate her esthetic. The floor-to-ceiling windows at the back of the house let in oodles of light and were an instrumental part of the initial design.

CABINETS, IKEA.CA. COUNTERS, CAESARSTONEUS.COM. BACKSPLASH, CIOT.COM. WINDOWS, BIGFOOTDOOR.COM. LIGHTS, BARSTOOLS, MORBA.MYSHOPIFY.COM.



← PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS

Wanda points to this bathroom as the perfect example of how working with a professional can elevate a space. Careful consideration was put into the mixing of different but complementary tiles, the choice of light fixture and the custom-designed shelving. Even the simple decision of a sink with a built-in towel bar makes sense in this small space.

LIGHT, ONEFORTYTHREE.COM. WALL TILES, STONE-TILE.COM.

↑ PLAY UP A COZY BEDROOM WITH DARK WALLS

Matte charcoal-grey paint emphasizes the dramatic rooflines of the third-floor master bedroom. In a mix with woods, the paint's overall effect is warm and intimate.

BED, WALL LIGHTS, IKEA.CA.



See more photos of this house.