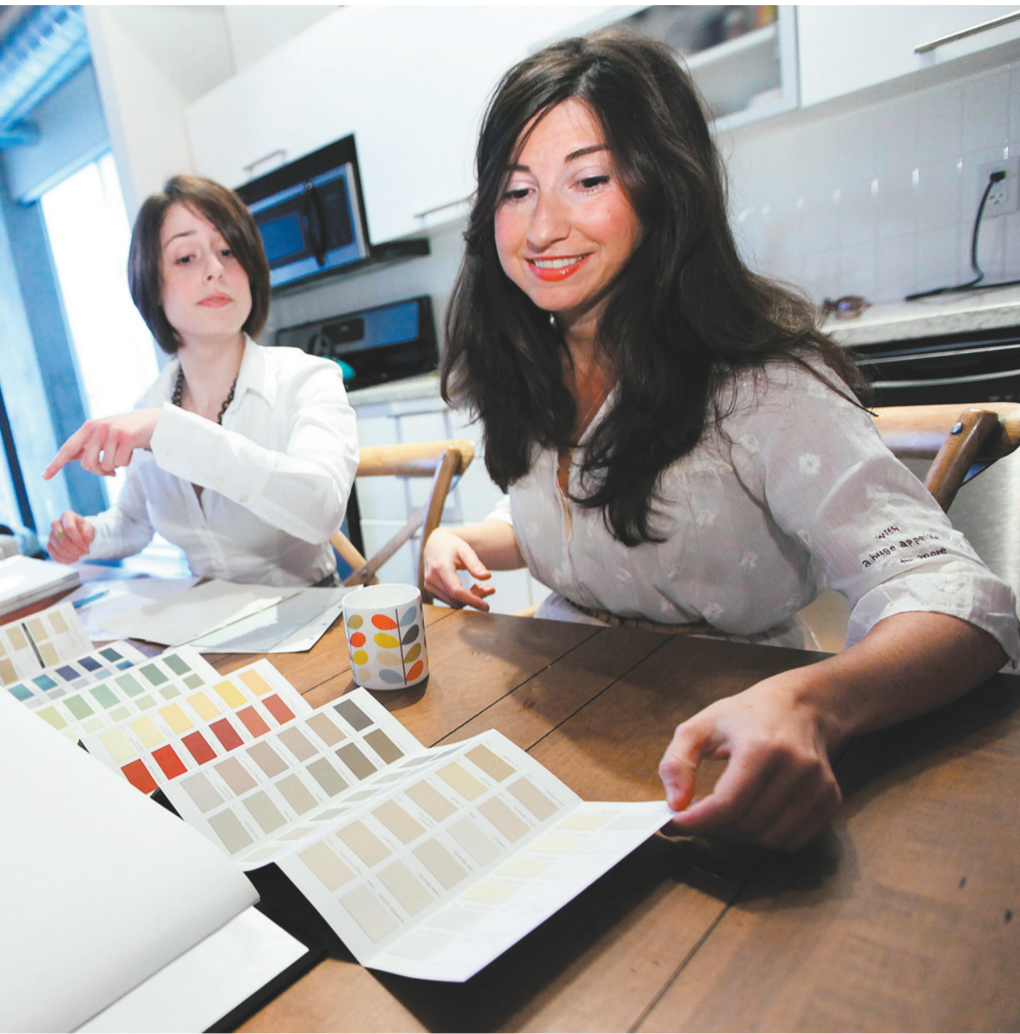


# condos

*I love colour — in fashion and in my friends. But I often feel like I have enough colour (read: chaos) in my life that I don't need it splashed on my walls*



TIM FRASER FOR NATIONAL POST

Farrow & Ball's Beth Lowenfeld (left) visits Olivia Stren at home for a colour consultation.

## SPRING SWATCH-SLEUTHING

Too nursery-room blue!  
Too blah beige! New condo owner  
*Olivia Stren's* search for the perfect paint colour

Trees are at last popping into frothy, minty bloom and to reward myself for surviving another interminable stretch of sun-starved Toronto winter, I've determined to dress my condo in fresh colour. In this country, the colour palette in winter is limited to Soviet-gulag shades of slush and cement, and my condo is hardly an antidote: Its walls washed in anemic builder's white. So, to celebrate the end of parka season, I'm opting for consoling, beachy colour.

But I'm a Gemini and therefore desperately remedial at decision-making. So, beholding a fan of Benjamin Moore paint chips and choosing between, say, Creme Fraiche and Lemon Sorbet, feels like *Sophie's Choice*. Although there is something thrilling about surrounding one's self in paint chips — each feels like a happy snack, a nibble of possibility and renewal.

In efforts to settle on a shade, I head to a Benjamin Moore store for professional guidance. I tell a staffer I'm thinking about Ocean Air — an ethereal cloud-like blue. “That's a wonderful colour for a nursery,” the man says. Thing is, I'm not painting a room for an infant, I'm painting one for an adult (i.e., me). He looks at me with a look of confusion. I feel insecure about my choice, wondering why I'm apparently drawn to colours meant for the be-diapered, and I decided to enlist even more professional counsel to complicate matters further.

I go to Toronto colour empress Jane Hall's shop in the Beach, Jane Hall Voice of Style. The place is a whirl of gutsy, caffeinated colour, pillow-heaped settees and bins bulging with bright bolts of fabrics. “People come in here and have a cry,” says Ms. Hall. “Here, people see the possibil-

ities. It's like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Cirque du Soleil*.” The store is divided into different colour sections (spice, passion, flirt, classic, serenity). We sit in the Serenity corner on a curvaceous patchwork sofa, and all around us are blood-pressure-mellowing shades of pool blues and whipped cream. The area is so feminine, I feel as if I've been transported to Marie Antoinette's Versailles, as if I should spend the rest of my day biting into petits fours, sipping champagne and giggling. “Design has become too masculine,” says Ms. Hall. “It's lost its femininity, its sensuality, its curvaceousness.” Her shop stands as a lively rebuke to that trend.

Ms. Hall has equally passionate feelings about beige (she hates it and all its metaphoric implications) and loathes the recent beigification of our homes. “I don't understand it — we lust for sunshine and beaches, we go away to find them, then we come back and paint our homes beige! It's like living in a dead mushroom.” She prides herself on being able to spot a “beige person” as soon as they walk through the door. I ask her what gives their beigeness away. “They walk out,” she laughs.

I might well loathe beige — and its dullard twin, grey — as much as Jane Hall does. I love colour — in fashion and in my friends. But I often feel like I have enough colour (read: chaos) in my life that I don't necessarily need it splashed on my walls. I'd prefer soothing, stress-quashing colour, so I choose escape and denial and make for Farrow & Ball's Rosedale showroom. Here, paint chips are lickably yum-my-looking, and lovely pots of paint look like the sort you might have found in Beatrix Potter's Lake District atelier. The company, based in Dor-

set, England, has a well-edited stable of 132 carefully selected colours. Perusing them (and their tasty names: Dorset Cream, Cooking Apple Green, Eating Room Red) and I feel like donning some Hunter wellies, tucking into a scone, and gazing at scampering bunnies from the garden of some English cottage.

Farrow & Ball's Toronto showroom manager Beth Lowenfeld comes to my place for a colour consult. She suggests a soft, salt-air blue (called, plainly, Powder Blue) I tell her what the Benjamin Moore staffer had said about pale blue and its nursery vibe and she offers comfort: “There are no decorating rules — it's about what suits this space and what suits you. You're looking for a fresh, oceanic blue, and pale powder is light and will help keep your space open and clean.” And since my place has a certain hard-edged, quasi-loft aesthetic, Ms. Lowenfeld suggests the blue will provide a feminine counterpoint. “Concrete is masculine, and this colour is soft and gentle, creating a nice tension. But it's also soft without being girly.” And it's not beige. I'm sold.

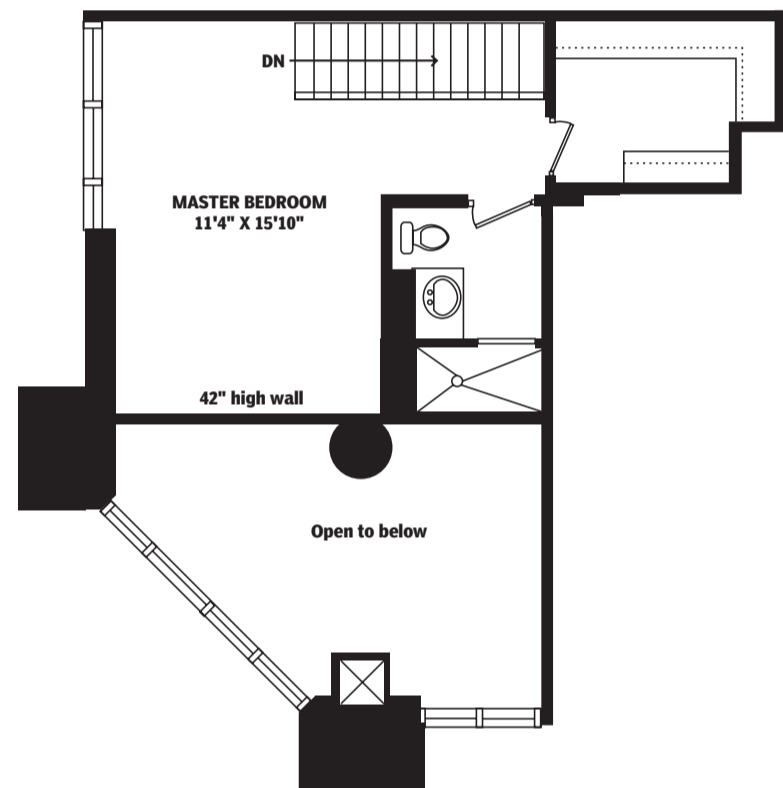
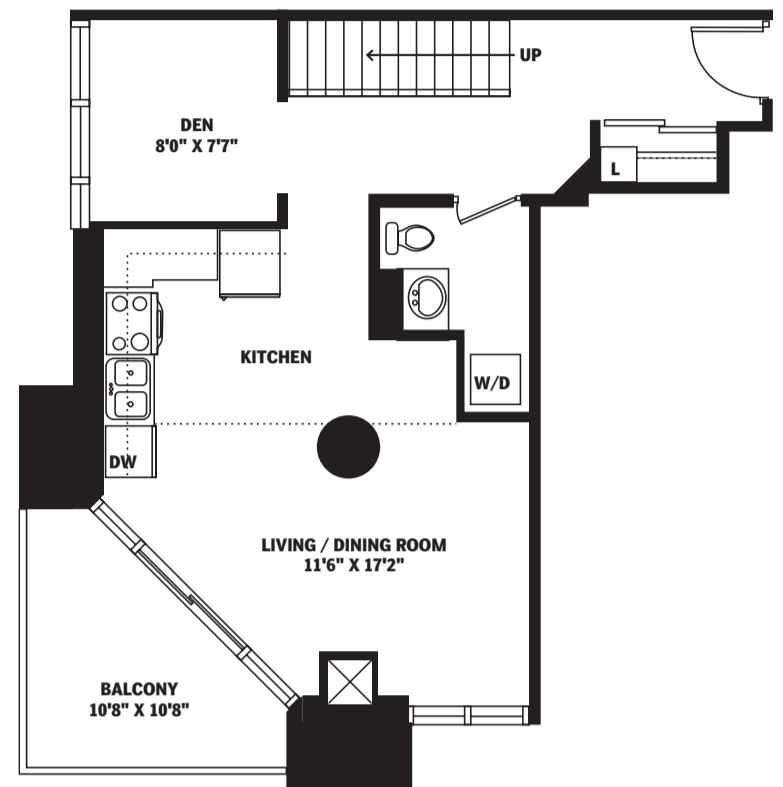
We move to the bedroom. “I have two philosophies when it comes to bedroom paint. People either want something deep and enveloping, like a big hug at night, or they want something bright and cheerful in the morning.” Though I'm generally a fan of the hug, I belong in the latter category, so select a paint called Tallow: a creamy hue that looks like a warm and luminous shade of butter.

F&B is also well-known for its vast selection of traditional wallpapers — the kind you imagine should panel reading rooms in English manors. Their patterns are elegant, eminently civilized without ever lurching towards florid Victoriana. Their newest Arts & Crafts-inspired collection of so-called Lotus Papers — available in 30 colours and two pattern sizes — is drawn from 19th-century French archives and looks best suited to a petite wall. Like the wall in my alleged “office,” which, let's be honest, at the moment is about as welcoming and well-trafficked as certain corners of the tundra. I thought that if I furnished the “office” with a lovely desk (I did), then I might be inspired to work there and, as a result, be more prolific, industrious, etc. However, the desk is currently moonlighting as a divan for my cats, Lemon and Penguin, who do find the area most inspiring (to nap in). I now have a new plan: glam up the “office” in Lotus Papers F&B wallpaper. There. Decisions made. I can officially declare my condo — as I do my life — a beige-free zone.

National Post

## CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Three design experts analyze a layout for an 898-square-foot condo



### ANTHONY PROVENZANO

Architect/interior designer/furniture designer



When you split 898 square feet over two floors, you're talking about a working 450-sq.-ft. floor plate, times two. And while a 900-sq.-ft. condo sounds great, working a floor plan that's half of that is a challenge. In this one-bedroom unit, you live downstairs (which is tight) and sleep upstairs (which is generous) with a volumetric connection to what's below.

I have to say that I absolutely loathe the 45-degree

angled windows. In spite of that, I love the amount of light they provide. There is an atrium above the living/dining area that will bring in loads of natural light. The master bedroom is surrounded in natural light with a full-height window and a low wall facing the atrium space. And I think that's a good thing. The ground floor has a logical placement of rooms but one's eye is drawn to that column in the space.

I would rework the laundry/powder room so it is lined up against the wall opposite the kitchen. You could use pocket doors to avoid door swings,

and I would ensure there's enough space to physically clear the column. Upstairs, I might extend the washroom all the way to the window on one side of the column. While this would claim some of the atrium space, it would give you a chance to add storage (which this unit lacks), and who doesn't like a window in their bathroom?

But mostly, I'd beg the architect to change the design of the building to eliminate the 45-degree windows.

■ Anthony Provenzano is an architect, interior designer and furniture designer.

### DEE DEE TAYLOR HANNAH

Architect/interior designer



Confessions of a Bad Planner: Did someone just pretend not to see the column? This should provoke a call to the architect: Could we review structure (it is 2009!) and come up with some alternative support method so that perhaps someone could live in this space bruise free? The main floor living/dining room real estate is prime so that eating it up with

washer/dryer is criminal. Cut back the powder room to toilet/sink and send out the laundry or move it upstairs. If we are stuck with that column, perhaps make seating around the perimeter with movable tables. The double-height space can have a full wall of books/TV/audio that will require a ladder for full access.

Upstairs, place the bathroom where the walk-in closet is now. By eliminating the bathroom, the room suddenly expands with possibilities. The window at the

top of the stairs can be centred and oval in shape, with built-ins surrounding the opening. Extend a wall where the stair railing is and place the bed to face the opening to below. Now, you have opened up both walls for investment furniture. Buy pieces that you can refurbish as the budget allows. Don't buy junk mass-produced furniture on credit; invest in quality antiques over time.

■ Dee Dee Taylor Hannah operates Taylor Hannah Architect and is a partner in Montclair Construction.

### HARRY CHRISTAKIS

Architect



Although this seems like a large unit by today's standards, the multiple enclosed spaces coupled with the angled windows and a large round column create an awkward layout, making the unit seem less spacious and less functional.

Open up as much of the main living space as possible to take advantage of the many windows

and the two-storey layout that make this unit unique.

Shrink the size of the powder room by relocating the washer and dryer to the second floor walk-in closet, where most loads are generated. I would then reposition the vanity across from the toilet to create a smaller rectangular powder room.

Change the kitchen to a U-shape and open up the wall between the den and the kitchen so the kitchen also benefits from the additional windows. This would

also open the possibility to create a breakfast bar on one side.

The den could remain in the same spot or the space could be used for dining.

As an alternative, the dining area could also be set up in the space formerly occupied by the washer/dryer and defined by the round column, leaving ample space for a functional living room. ■ Harry Christakis is principal of HCA Architecture, specializing in hospitality and residential architecture and interior design.