

GREAT

Clearing a dingy rooming house for a bright family home

By Leslie Smith
Photos by Naomi Finlay and Scott Norsworthy

Dylan Horvath used to walk down St. Clarens Avenue en route to the grocery store. He loved the eclectic Brockton neighbourhood – the mom-and-pops, the local school, the older homes in various stages of repair or disrepair. The director of Cortex Design Inc., a product design firm, Horvath regularly draws up plans for everything from keyboards to medical equipment and office furniture; he knows good form when he sees it. So when a decrepit, east-facing rooming house with good bones came up for sale in 2009, he moved in with his wife, Sunshine, and their children. Eager to reveal those bones, Horvath tore out the walls that divided the main floor into small, useless spaces. Once he'd reached the cross-trussed rafters and exposed brick wall, however, he and Sunshine knew it was time to enlist help. →

PHOTO BY SCOTT NORSWORTHY



WIDE OPEN

An open-tread staircase by Space Furniture and a stretch of exposed rafters separate the east-facing main entrance from the kitchen.



↑ Oiled oak from Stone Tile covers the first floor. IKEA cabinetry, customized with stainless steel tops and glossy fronts. Table by Restoration Hardware; Eames-inspired chairs from DesignRepublic.

↙ A half-inch reveal separates the foyer's plywood-clad closet from the bulkhead and tiled ceiling. The drywall, with a dental-like reveal around the rafters, gives the ceiling a clean finish.

↓ The wall surrounding reclaimed lockers conceals wiring and a mechanical shaft. Made from the guts of IKEA cabinets and clad in plywood, the light switch's custom inset sits half an inch deep.

↓ The lockers, sourced from Smash, keep the kids' stuff tidy in the foyer. For the parents, architect Wanda Ely designed a plywood closet with custom-cut shelves. Stainless steel handle by Richelieu.



At his kids' school, Horvath met Wanda Ely, an architect who had recently launched her own studio after working with major firms for years. "Is that your house on Argyle Street?" he asked, guessing that hers was the one nearby with the modernist cube affixed to its flat roof. After touring her open concept suite with a walkout deck, he knew he'd found the person to "bring my ideas to life."

Topping his wish list were clean lines, timeless style and (with three kids) durability. Ely recalls how he had manhandled everything from hinges and doorknobs to flooring "like a handshake. If it was limp, it had to go." His insistence on sturdiness inspired her to source commercial-grade products. The result: a fun, sophisticated, withstand-the-test-of-time family home.

In the entranceway, a washable marble mosaic runs up one wall and across the ceiling. Three colourful reclaimed metal-mesh lockers, embedded in a slick plywood storage unit, circumvent the typical front hall coat-boot-and-backpack jumble. A mall-style metal grate catches dirt and water with its hidden pan. From here, the entire oiled white oak main floor is on view: from the living room and its opaque, tilt-and-turn window to the dining room with its perfectly parallel electrical conduits – all the way to the kitchen. →



← A light-diffusing film on the commercial-grade, tilt-and-turn window (from AP Doors) shades the living room. Gus Modern sectionals; pillows by Bev Hisey.

↑ Marble mosaic tile runs up one wall and across the ceiling to delineate the foyer. The aluminum entrance grate has a pan underneath to catch water and grit.



PHOTO OF ENTRANCE BY SCOTT NORSWORTHY

Outside the upstairs bathroom, the family room/studio's wall is finished with custom-tinted chalkboard paint by Benjamin Moore.





↑ The kid-friendly bathroom features a floating trough sink from [Everyfaucet.com](#). The maple shelves by [Space Furniture](#) have routed slots for storing vases, tea lights and toothbrushes. → Stacked laundry machines are tucked behind a bathroom door. The one-by-four foot tiles are from [Stone Tile](#); electric towel warmer by [Runtal](#).

“I wanted the kitchen to resemble a machine,” says Horvath. Stainless steel clads its countertops, and appliances and storage areas are safely compartmentalized, with plenty of kid space leading to the back. Another wraparound, custom-clad and reconfigured IKEA unit connects to the dining area. Perfectly kitty-corner, the two systems hide the home’s electrical and storage nerve centres.

In the family bathroom at the top of the stairs, another tilt-and-turn window directs airflow, while Edison light fixtures echo those in the front hall, and porcelain tiling replicates wood grain downstairs. Here Ely contained a stacked washer and dryer in a cupboard and installed a sink long enough for the kids to brush their teeth together. Outside, blueprint-blue chalkboard paint coats one wall in the family room – a nod to Horvath’s and Ely’s designer beginnings. Perhaps the duo can use it to start plotting Phase Two – remodelling the second-floor master bedroom and third-floor kids’ room – of this intriguing reno. [DL](#)

