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THE LIGHTER SIDE

A 1930S FIXER-UPPER GETS STRIPPED
DOWN AND REFRESHED WITH A PALE
PALETTE AND AIRY FURNISHINGS.

*Text by Deirdre Kelly
Photography by Margaret Mulligan*



ABOVE: Homeowner Marni Lokash on her patio. Glass, Fresh Home & Garden.

OPPOSITE AND RIGHT: The monochromatic living room gets its interest from pattern and texture. Polished

metal sconces add glamour. The fireplace was refaced with limestone. Limestone, Forest Hill Marble; sconces, Merigo Home Furnishings; drapery, Tara Fingold Interiors; coffee table, Studio b home.



She sells houses for a living.

But even Marni Lokash felt first-time-buyer anxiety, and for the longest time avoided buying a house herself. "I was too nervous," confesses the real-estate broker. "I considered it a big responsibility, because I'm single and buying by myself."

So she continued to dream of owning. And over time, that dream became increasingly specific. "I knew exactly the house I wanted," she continues. "A two-storey, three-bedroom, in a particular neighbourhood — your typical North Toronto starter house." Oh, and one more thing: it had to be a dump. "I wanted whatever I bought to be an absolute disaster, a house I could rip apart from top to bottom, and put my stamp on."

Faster than you can say, "dreams do come true," Marni found what she was looking for, four years ago, while trawling the MLS listings: yes, a two-storey, three bedroom, two-bathroom starter house in her chosen area. It was also a wreck. "I took one look at it and knew it was going to be my house," she recalls.

But before committing, she called her friend Tara Fingold, a Toronto interior designer who had recently renovated Marni's mother's condo (shown in *House & Home*, August 2006), to get her opinion. "It was dilapidated," recalls Fingold of the 1,400-square-foot 1930s house being sold by its original owners. "But within five minutes, I knew it was perfect for Marni. The bones were still strong. All the structural elements were still in place. I knew I could make it work for today's modern living."

First on the agenda was exploiting the home's potential



Planted with moss, the flagstone patio is like a country garden in the city. Wild grasses and low-maintenance plants like hydrangeas, peonies and lilies thrive in the sunny setting landscaped to echo the muted indoor colour scheme. Landscaping, Inside & Out Garden Design; sculptures, Fresh Home & Garden.



New double french doors in the dining room help connect indoors and out. The space is open to the living room and kitchen, which enhances traffic flow. Wicker chairs lend visual texture. Paint colour, Gourmet Mushroom (SW 1142), Sherwin-Williams; trim colour, Cloud White (CC-40), Benjamin Moore.

*“That’s what sold me
— the feeling of light
bearing through”*



Opening the kitchen to the dining room allowed for the creation of a marble-topped peninsula with a breakfast bar. Marble for counters, backsplash tiles, Forest Hill Marble. **BELOW:** The mudroom-pantry's new french doors allow easy access to the garden and garage. An antiqued hutch provides extra storage. Wall colour: Roasted Almond (SW 1143), Sherwin-Williams.



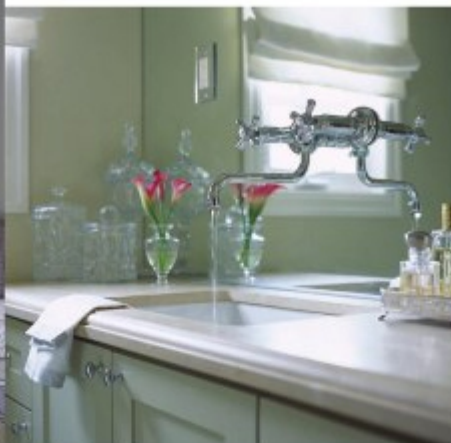
for light. "I remember the day I saw it; it was the weekend before Easter and a beautiful sunny day. Light flooded the dining room and filtered into the living room. It was gorgeous," Marni says. "That's what sold me — the feeling of light bearing through."

To enhance that feeling, homeowner and designer agreed to tear down the wall separating the dining room from the kitchen to allow more natural sunlight to flow into the core of the house. Next, Fingold, a former retail designer for Calvin Klein boutiques across Canada, suggested using a warm, fresh white to paint out the original dark wood trim and wainscoting, and replacing a brick wall at the back of the kitchen with french doors opening onto the patio and garden. Pulling up decades-old green shag carpeting ("It had dog hairs embedded pretty deep," recalls Marni, wrinkling her nose), Fingold found original oak floors in good condition. "We stained them a yummy chocolate brown for dramatic contrast with the walls and furnishings," she says. "It's a look I call 'modern elegance'."

But creating that look took ingenuity. Marni might be a dreamer, but her dreams were tied to a budget. The strategy was to mix inexpensive details with luxe touches in each room, chiefly the kitchen, Marni's favourite spot. "I love to cook and entertain," she says. "For me, the kitchen is the focal point of a house, and so I knew, even before renovating, that I wanted an apron sink to be the main attraction. I knew



Warm greys and crisp whites create a sense of calm in the principal bedroom, while matelassé curtains and cable-knit broadloom add softness. Marni was instantly sold on the east-facing room: "I love sunlight on my pillow in the morning." Carpet, Dominion Rug; bed linens, Au Lit Fine Linens; chandelier, The Home Depot; wall colour, Silverado (SW 1005), Sherwin-Williams.



BELOW, LEFT: The house had few closets, so in the principal bedroom, Fingold designed built-ins that house the TV and store clothes behind toile curtains for a soft, feminine touch. Boxes (top shelf), Teatro Verde.

ABOVE: By adding a wall-mounted faucet, Fingold saved on space in the bathroom, which is visually enlarged by a wall mirror. Vanity limestone, Forest Hill Marble; wall colour, Castlefoam (SW 1135), Sherwin-Williams.



that it was the one thing that everyone would look at, and so I spent a mint getting it."

To make sure the sink didn't sink her friend, Fingold opted for reasonably priced off-the-shelf Shaker-style cabinetry, but then splurged on a beautiful creamy marble countertop and a tumbled-marble basketweave-pattern backsplash to give the room "a timeless, classic look."

She saved more money when designing the makeshift mudroom-pantry (leading off the kitchen to the corner lot's two-car garage), where she created much-needed storage with an armoire that once belonged to Marni's mother. "By antiquing it to go with the rest of the kitchen, we were able to avoid custom built-ins, which would have been quite costly," says Fingold.

When they did purchase new furniture, the goal was to create a feminine look without breaking the bank. In the dining room, Fingold paired Marni's existing table with inexpensive wicker chairs, and in the second-storey principal bedroom, she juxtaposed a wall of custom built-ins with a faux-crystal chandelier purchased from The Home Depot.

In the adjacent bathroom, where a mirrored wall helps open up the tight space, Fingold used a wall-mounted bar faucet, "which freed up counter space and, in turn, floor space because it meant I could build a narrower vanity." By installing high-end limestone flooring and countertops, and pairing them with simple ceramic tile for the tub surround, Fingold created a luxurious but affordable oasis of calm.

"This house has a whole new lease on life," she says. Marni, smiling, adds, "It's simple and light, fresh and happy." ■