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DESIGN
Summer 2013

MODERNIST REVIVAL

Simplicity and elegance in a 1950s classic

BY MEGAN MARTIN • PHOTOGRAPHY: DREW HADLEY • STYLING: JEAN MONET

All furnishings in the living room were purchased through Montreal stores specializing in Mid-century Modern design. The wood buffet was purchased from Phil's 20th Century Design and the rug is from Jack's. (Opposite) The family pet finds a perch in the garden.

WHEN ARCHITECT MAGDA KUSKOWSKI first visited the 1950s-era property on Westmount Avenue, her initial thought was how uncommon it is to find a home of that sort in the area. But it was no coincidence that her client had chosen that particular home; the owner had an affinity for artwork and furnishings from the 1950s.

"Finding the house was very important to him because it's such a great representation of the homes from that time," said Magda. "He really found a property that spoke to him, so

when I took on the project in 2003 I had to make sure to preserve the unique spirit of the home."

It took several phases carried out over eight years for Magda and her partners at Architem to complete their work on redesigning the Westmount home. The result is an extremely simple, elegant and interestingly contemporary take on a classic 1950s residence.

Viewing the split-level home from the front is deceiving, as it appears to be just one storey. But because of its position on a slope,

there is another level visible only from the rear of the house.

Originally, the garage and home were separate structures connected simply by a canopy that allowed passers-by to see into the backyard. Rather than maintaining this empty space, Kuskowski opted to design a large vestibule that connects the main house to the garage.





(Opposite) Bought from an estate, the mahogany dining set was built in Montreal in the '40s or '50s by students of Ernest Cormier. Over the buffet hangs Natasha St. Michael's beaded work Inhabited. Claude Maurer's Rouge et Noir is on the adjacent wall.



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"The completely glazed vestibule contains the home's front door," Kuskowski said. "Inside it's paneled in wood with an interesting sculpture and chair looking into the backyard of the home." Aside from being a sleek addition, the vestibule also improved the property's privacy by blocking the street view of the backyard.

Inside the home, the biggest challenge for Kuskowski was to create a design that opened up the interior. "It's not a huge home to begin with, and the original layout was very cut up with small rooms and corridors," she said. "So the client really wanted us to open up the interior space to the garden."

In order to do so, the architect created a design that called for removing many of the home's partitions to produce a large living area that is connected to the kitchen and dining room.

The kitchen design is very sleek, but the extensive use of wood creates a warmer feeling than one would usually associate with Mid-century Modern style. "The open plan of the kitchen and dining room accommodates formal functions such as dinner parties and also blends well with the rest of the house," said Kuskowski. 



The sculpture in the vestibule (top, left) is Springtime in Madawaska, by Keith D. Wilson.

Many artists, most of whom are Montreal-based, are represented in the home.

The owner's love of 1950s-themed furniture extends beyond the interior. The era-appropriate pieces chosen for the patio and garden provide continuity, and the use of wood with retro-coloured chairs fits well with the overall theme of the property.



"The client really wanted us to open up the interior space to the garden."

"The original windows were punched openings."



Large and numerous cabinets create practical storage space, while the island is ideal for both food preparation and entertaining. The cherry wood used throughout the kitchen is beautifully complemented by its dark granite countertops.

In order to maximize natural light in the main part of the house, Kuskowski's design incorporated several windows facing into the courtyard. "The original windows were punched openings. We enlarged these openings by using a curtain-wall system, recalling the original window pattern," she said.

In addition to bathing the space in natural light—particularly in the afternoons—the wall of windows allows for a wonderful view of the home's garden and patio. "This courtyard can be viewed from the living area and the master bedroom suite," said Kuskowski.

On the upper split, the master bedroom is a large room with an ensuite bathroom and walk-in closet. The master bathroom incorporates charcoal-coloured tiles with a wood vanity, again striking a balance between contemporaneity and warmth.

The top level also contains a second bedroom and bathroom, both with feminine touches of aqua blue and white. "There were originally three bedrooms on the top floor, but the rooms were somewhat small," said Kuskowski. "Repurposing the space allowed us to create two nicely sized bedrooms instead."

The lower level of the split, which has its own entrance, contains a bedroom, bathroom and good-sized family room. Its exposure on both the south and west sides of the structure allows for lovely natural lighting. The living room contains shelving units made of maple wood and a large sliding-door cabinet in keeping with the home's 1950s design.

"Throughout the entire property we were careful to maintain the essence of the home while introducing modern elements into it," Kuskowski said. "Overall the whole project was just so interesting and different."

The mirror above the living-room buffet reflects copper and ceramic plates by Micheline de Passille and Yves Sylvestre. Above the fireplace hangs François Vincent's La Terre.