

CITY | LIFE | STYLE | CALGARY

SEPTEMBER 2009 | \$4.95 AVENUECALGARY.COM

avenue

Film Fest Primer

Bring on the mavericks
as film fest turns 10

For Sale

How to sell your
home now
(and not lose your shirt)

Let's Do Lunch

Meet the folks
who feed 2,000
kids a day

Fly Away

Behind the
scenes at YYC

BACK TO BUSINESS

Cool autumn style for the office

The Simple Life

After multiple renovations, this Elbow Park bungalow still stays true to its mid-century roots and is comfortably modern in its minimalism

For long-time downtown

resident Phillip van der Merwe, Elbow Park, with its quiet streets, old trees and multi-level homes, always seemed like the suburbs. It wasn't until he rented a house in the neighbourhood to escape the hustle-and-bustle of loft living on 17th Avenue S.W. that he fell in love with the historic inner-city community and was inspired to put down roots.

In 2004, he bought this classic flat-roofed 1950s bungalow and has since taken it from a 1,000-square-foot space to 2,600 square-feet through two major renovations. With the help of architect and designer Michael Shugarman, principal at Templar Architecture and Design, van der Merwe seamlessly fused new layers onto his home: first with a massive kitchen overhaul in 2005, and then with an expansion last year that added an office, a sunroom, a deck and a double-attached garage to the front of the house.

Although the home's new features, wood-and-glass scheme and mostly white walls are obviously contemporary, the changes respect — and even mimic — the original property's mid-century sensibility. The result is a comfortably modern space that is minimalistic, without being too austere, and slightly nostalgic, without the kitsch.

"I wanted something modern and earthy," says van der Merwe. "I'm sick and tired of trendy."

He says he wanted to keep everything functional with good, honest design that wasn't frivolous or pretentious. Even the doggy doors and Texas gates at the major exits for his miniature dachshund, Ben, blend into the simple esthetic. ➤



Above

The home's open concept creates well-defined rooms that flow easily into the next, such as the living room and the adjacent dining room.

Right

The family room at the back of the house blends traditional and modern details for visual interest.





An original stone fireplace, a four-piece coffee table made from condemned poplar wood and a copper-coloured sofa offer earthy touches to the minimalist living room.

"I wanted something modern and earthy. I'm sick and tired of trendy." -Phillip van der Merwe, homeowner



Lots of natural light and contemporary artwork in the home office help to create an inviting place to work and relax.

"Being an old house, it still has a lot of quirks, little bends here and there, things that don't line up, but I actually don't mind it," he says.

Shugarman agrees and says he's an advocate for addition renovations that can preserve much of an old home's history.

"Anytime you rip something down and build new, it's always going to be a young soul," he says. "It's never an old soul that comes back with many lives."

However, the challenge is how to blend the old and new without making the addition look tacked-on. Shugarman says the decision to build onto the front of the home was in part due to the fact there was no rear-lane access on the property. But this also afforded them a chance to create an entire new look for the house, thus increasing the home's curb appeal.

"What the reno has done is really open up the space," says van der Merwe. "You walk in and it's all connected." ➤➤

Ready, Set, Reno

Overhauling a home is a massive undertaking that can have dramatic payoffs but requires patience, open-mindedness and some practical sense. Designer Michael Shugarman of Templar Architecture and Design and homeowner Phillip van der Merwe tell it from both sides of the project and give their tips.

Hire a professional. "There are little details that a designer can bring that you can't get even if you have an eye for things," says van der Merwe. From the design of the stairs to a media shelf in the family room that seems to float as one piece, small features in this home were given as much attention as the larger projects.

Respect what's already there. "Embrace what you're starting with and work with that," says Shugarman. Many of this home's coolest features, such as the

hidden closets and storage, were built into existing spaces from the home's original structure.

Be a good neighbour. A reno that changes an exterior affects not only your property, but also the community. To keep good relations, van der Merwe suggests introducing the general contractor to your neighbours before you start so they have someone to speak to if concerns arise.

Be prepared for surprises. Make sure you have a budget that exceeds what your quotes are for, not only to cover financial uncertainty, but also unexpected discoveries that may require more time and work, says Shugarman. This renovation was already underway at the peak of the economic crisis. As a consequence, plans for a two-storey renovation were pared down to an addition on the main floor only.

"The reno really opens up the space. You walk in and it's all connected." –Phillip van der Merwe

Below

The southeast-facing sunroom is outfitted with multi-functional furnishings so it can be formal or casual.

The kitchen, with its large granite-top island, glass display cabinet and stainless steel appliances, was overhauled in the home's first reno.



Below Marble tiles and a sleek white scheme give the master ensuite a luxe feel.



The master bedroom downstairs features clean lines and custom-designed furniture such as the bed and nightstands.

The general feeling of the home is one of laid-back warmth and simple, but striking design.

Several of Shugarman's cleverly custom-designed furnishings add to the simple modernism of the home. A coffee table in the family room has a slot for magazines and a nook for the nearby ottoman to tuck underneath; the copper-coloured living room sofa with chaise is one seamless piece without separate cushions; and for the glass-topped table in the sunroom, he eschewed traditional legs and used a multifunctional timber frame.

"There was a debate of whether or not it should be a dining or coffee table, so it became an ambition to have something that could be both," says Shugarman. By flipping the base onto its side, the table can be converted to a low coffee table. A pair of plush orange wool chairs — modelled after ones Shugarman created for the Juniper Hotel in Banff — and matching ottomans also gives the space flexibility to be formal or casual.

"It's my favourite room in the house," says van der Merwe. "Even though it's southeast-facing, it's amazing how much light stays in here. When the sun sets, it lights up this whole area."

Much of that natural light also streams into the large adjoining kitchen. At its centre, a nine-foot-long, glossy granite island is a perfect meeting spot for intimate dinner parties. There is even a built-in warming oven for van der Merwe, who is a culinary enthusiast.

"When people come over, I don't want to stand with my back to them," he says of the decision to place the gas-burning cook top on the island. "It's nice being able to stand there and mind your food and your guests at the same time."

van der Merwe also chose to include a second dishwasher for pragmatic reasons. "It's like my version of a scullery," he says. "When I'm entertaining, things just go in there and they don't clutter up the space. It's out of sight, out of mind."

For the stuff that van der Merwe wants to display, a wall-to-wall glass cabinet opposite the pantry is filled with an assortment of glassware, antique teacups and teapots, as well as various trinkets he's picked up around the world.

Nostalgic touches from van der Merwe's childhood in South Africa are also peppered throughout the house and bring a different kind of history into the space. Patterned cushions from his mother's old divan sit on his couch in the family room while, downstairs, a six-foot-long mounted python skin from his grandfather's farm near Kruger National Park hangs prominently in the hallway.

But nothing is as striking as the worn and yellowed oversized map of South Africa from 1944 that covers the entire dining room wall.

This is definitely not an understatement. With floor-to-ceiling windows at the front and back of the house and an open-concept layout, standing at either entrance you have an unobstructed view of the greenery in both directions.

Continuing this clean, unfettered look, a wall of hidden storage divides the kitchen from the living room on the main floor. By utilizing flush door panels that blend in with the walls and discreet hardware for the handles, Shugarman also concealed a powder room near the front door and a coat closet inside an existing column in the entranceway.

Original narrow oak hardwood floor planks were matched so closely in the new section of the house, it's impossible to distinguish where the addition starts and ends.

Below Sandstone steps snake up the hill to this mid-century bungalow tucked away behind mature trees.

"It used to be in a government office in South Africa," van der Merwe says. "My mother used to work for National Education and they were just throwing things out. She saw this map and asked if she could have it because I love maps. It's fun to look at."

The rest of van der Merwe's art collection is an interesting mix of landscapes and abstracts, mostly by Western Canadian artists, that offer colourful contrasts and whimsical breaks from the overall neutral space. He has even hung canvases in his furnace room, mud room and garage.

On the lower level, the master bedroom offers a luxurious and more private respite. It's outfitted with smart, sophisticated features, including a custom-designed bed by Shugarman, a Carrara marble fireplace, plush caramel-coloured carpeting and a walk-in closet that's all plumbed and ready if van der Merwe decides to convert the space into a wet bar or wine cellar in a later renovation.

In the ensuite, heated tile floors and a sleek white tub along with a spacious standing shower give the space a hotel-suite vibe.

The general feeling of the home is one of laid-back warmth and simple, but striking design. Often, even in modern design, there is a tendency to be too ambitious and sometimes mixing materials can get too overboard, says Shugarman.

"Everyone wants to do something different and they are afraid of keeping it really simple," he says.

Getting back to basics is exactly what van der Merwe hopes to do now that two major renovations are behind him. Although he had plans to build up another level to add a bedroom, ensuite and den, further work to the house has been put on hold for now as he settles in.

"I'm looking forward to enjoying this and just relaxing," he says. "I'm in a city of a million people, I'm close to downtown, I get to walk to work next to the river and I see goslings. It's perfect."

For Sources, turn to page 144.

Floor-to-ceiling windows at the front and back of the house give an unobstructed view of the greenery in both directions.



The backyard's gentle slope and lush landscaping lends the spacious patio a great deal of privacy from neighbours.

