

STORY **JOYCE TURNER-GIONET**  
PHOTOGRAPHY **JASON HARTOG**

# reface

## YOUR SPACE



THIS RENO WAS A CLASSIC CASE OF LOVE IT OR LIST IT, ACCORDING TO **JEAN BISNAIRE**, OWNER AND HEAD DESIGNER FOR **NICHE DECOR**. Jean has two showrooms, one in Aurora and another in Newmarket/East Gwillimbury. He and designer **Elisse Shimonov** were the voices of reason that kept this reno on track, “coming up with brilliant solutions whenever we hit an unexpected snag,” says homeowner, Ida. Twenty-six years ago, when they first dropped in to Jean’s original Niche Decor location in Richmond Hill, Ida and her husband Andrew spoke to him about this reno. As often happens, life got in the way and other things took priority. Then, seven years ago, Jean and his design team breathed new life into the couple’s basement. They loved the outcome, but the big reno (main floor and master en suite) remained on a back burner. “In February of this year, we finally pulled the trigger,” says Ida. *Continued on page 78*



**LEFT:** The dining room marries a symphony of textures for a beautiful yet relaxed space.  
**ABOVE:** A stone wall adds a dynamic focal point.



Redesigning the main floor created an open space for entertaining. **BELOW LEFT:** A floating vanity is simple yet beautiful. **BELOW:** The grey palette allows for seamless transitions between rooms.

changer – Ida and Andrew now happily prep and cook together. They have loads of storage under the island; it’s all so easy now. Ida can’t believe how often she used to run to the basement pantry for pots, pans, bowls, etc. that lacked a permanent home in the kitchen. Family and friends can finally sit and chat with the cooks while dinner is prepared. The illusion of a bigger space is enhanced by the white lacquered custom cabinetry; its slim profile runs to the ceiling. The same treatment was given to the random, linear mosaic-marble, grey-and-white backsplash.

Ida and Andrew are busy professionals. A monochromatic colour palette – soft greys and crisp whites – is an instant de-stressor when they get home. The one concession to colour is a stunning cobalt blue; it defines the living spaces. On counter stools, it marks the end point of the kitchen; then it’s picked up again in the swivel chairs in the bistro space off the kitchen. Throw cushions, upholstery and vases on the custom living room built-ins echo the blue in varying hues.

The couple chose open spaces where everyone could be together. In the living room, the beverage fridge is an inspired addition, and a big hit with guests. They help themselves to drinks and dinner prep continues uninterrupted. In the dining room, Elisse suggested an upholstered banquette as an alternative to individual chairs, providing extended seating. A favourite element is the living room’s stone accent wall, a dramatic power play against light walls and softly upholstered furniture. A weather-washed oak floor with a hint of grey keeps the design grounded. “Andrew weighed in on everything technical,” Ida says. He’s particularly proud of his new surround sound system, which he planned himself. Ida loves the fact that speakers sit flush against the ceiling. No ugly cables to spoil the aesthetic. “The whole space comes together like a classic outfit,” says Jean proudly. *Continued on page 80*



“We like our neighbourhood and we didn’t want a new house or even a bigger one at this point, as our son and daughter are getting ready to leave us. Instead, we went for quality over quantity.” Construction and installation, including the high-end millwork, were done through Jean’s network of contractors and installers. All furniture and accessories are from Niche. It was a four-month project, during which three major walls were taken down to open up the kitchen, living room and dining room.

Jean believes a reno has everything to do with emotion, and decorating is just detail. How will you live in the space? What’s important to you? Along with budget considerations, these are questions he asks at an initial meeting. For Ida and Andrew, redesigning their kitchen topped their emotional wish list. Both love to cook and entertain, but their original kitchen was too cramped for two cooks working in harmony. The addition of the large island was a game



**TOP RIGHT:** Beautiful blue adds an understated splash of colour in the living room. **ABOVE:** Niche Decor’s Jean Bisnaire with clients Ida and Andrew. **LEFT:** A light-grey sectional and blue ottoman anchor the living room.



The redesign dramatically increased storage space. **BELOW:** A beverage station positioned between the dining space and living area is an inspired addition.

Although lavishing attention on the main floor was a major aspect of the reno, Ida and Andrew also wanted to jazz up the master bedroom and en suite by adding a little luxe: a floating, solid-maple custom vanity showcasing the mosaic floor tiles. Tall mirrors add height and glass shower walls run from floor-to-ceiling. In the master, combining a small sitting area and two hallway closets gave Ida the walk-in with custom built-ins that she'd always dreamed of. Ida also appreciates the small things, like the heated en suite floors and lighting in every closet.

Ida has a recommendation for anyone contemplating a renovation: "Hire Jean and Elisse. They're part artist, part therapist." She jokes that the two talked her down off the roof more than once over the four-month process. Andrew gets credit too, remaining mostly calm through it all. The couple and their two cats moved out during the reno, dropping in almost daily to watch it progress. Homeowners are often unaware of the hundreds of small decisions they will have to make. "At one point, we had finalized wall-outlet placement and then realized we had some of them sitting in the middle of a wall where we wanted to hang a piece of art. A good designer stops you from making bad decisions," she laughs.

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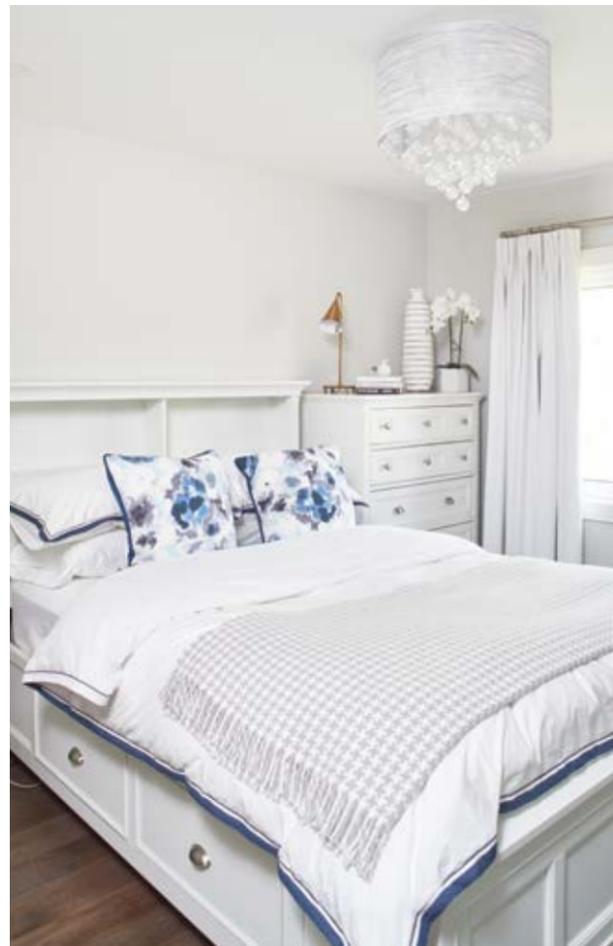
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Floor-to-ceiling glass opens up the master en suite space.  
**RIGHT:** Maple adds depth and richness on the vanity.



Would they do it all again? "If you'd asked us that right after the reno, we might have said no," Ida admits. Now, nine months later, enjoying every moment spent in this modern, well-designed living space, the couple's answer is a definite yes! **OH**



**LEFT:** The additional bedrooms are pretty in their simplicity. **ABOVE:** Monochromatic fabrics in muted tones create a tranquil backdrop for the end of the day.

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