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Issue 6.2010  
\$4.95

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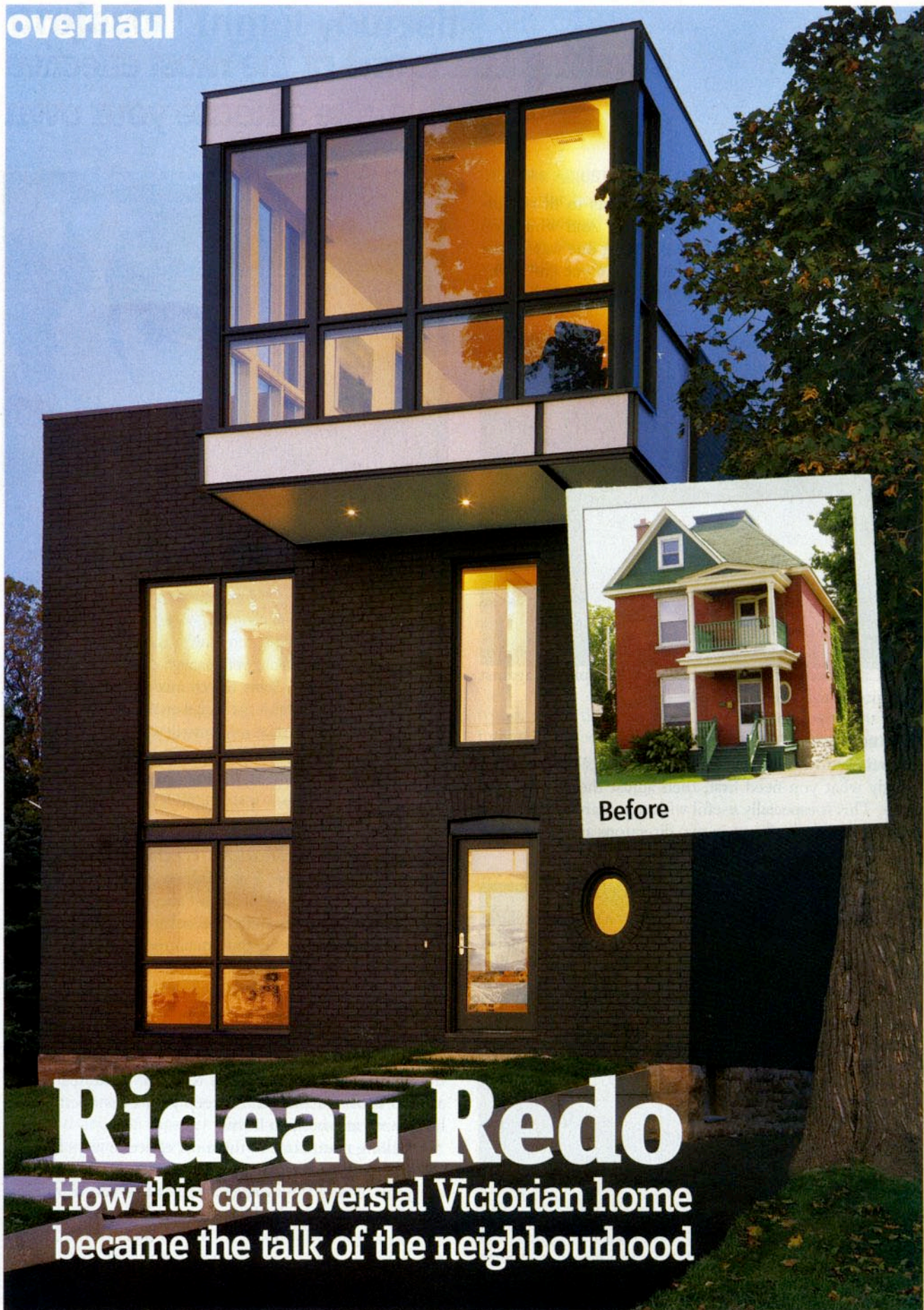
**+ Modernized Main Floor**  
A contemporary renovation



PM10005508



overhaul



Before

# Rideau Redo

How this controversial Victorian home became the talk of the neighbourhood



## The architect says people either love Echo House or think it's an architectural crime

The kitchen emerged as an important space for the couple. The architect's challenge was to maximize views and light while not compromising privacy.



It's a thoroughly contemporary Ottawa house that still manages to echo its 86-year Victorian heritage even though little remains of its past, save its brick exterior, masonry foundation and 750-square-foot footprint. That makes its name, Echo House, apt and not just because it's located on Echo Drive.

What was formerly a conventional two-storey, four-bedroom home overlooking the Rideau Canal, has been transformed into a vertical four-storey loft. But what makes the house a real eye-catcher and source of neighbourhood controversy is its glass-enclosed master bedroom. It's located in a cantilevered extension that hangs eight feet over the front façade.

It all started as a modest renovation; the owners, Mike and Sarah Dawson were originally looking to modernize the kitchen and bathroom. Out of the blue, they contacted Ottawa architect Paul Kariouk, of Kariouk Associates.

Kariouk, who also teaches architecture at Carleton University, discovered the house had been empty for years and had barely been touched in half a century.

Everything – from the plumbing and electricity to the floors and roof – was woefully sub-standard. Built in an era when the canal was used for industrial purposes, the house had small windows and porches that obstructed canal views.

The architect put forward multiple schemes to the clients, who became more excited about what was possible and the project quickly escalated. “My point was that they should avail themselves of the canal,” Kariouk says. “But they're also very private people, so it had to be done in a way to maintain their privacy.”

The clients started to think about how they would prefer to use their time in the house. To aid in the process, they created a timeline of how they spend every minute of the day: For example, Sarah wakes up at 8:00 and studies until taking breakfast at 8:45. A timeline was even created for their dog, a golden retriever. (Apparently the dog likes to spend much of the day staring at squirrels in disgust.)



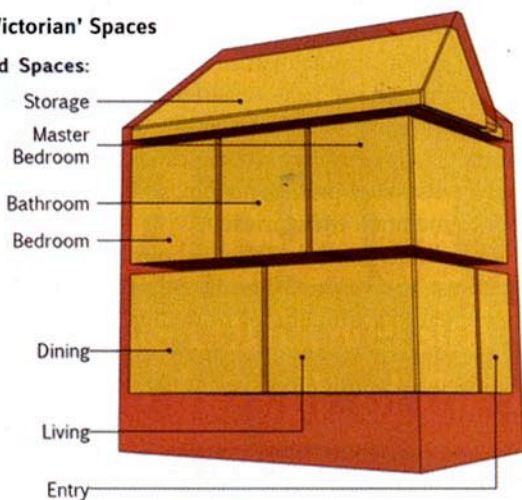
# overhaul | rideau redo



The 'hanging pods' include a study space (near side), leisure space (middle), and library (far side).

## Original 'Victorian' Spaces

### Introverted Spaces:



It emerged that for Sarah, the most important thing was a huge book library and study area as she works at home. For Mike, it was the shower and the kitchen. It was important for both to maximize views and light without compromising privacy.

Kariouk soon realized the attic space held the potential to realize those goals. The solution was to remove the roof, which allowed for the creation of the top floor master bedroom with a significant amount of glass, which makes it act as a skylight for the rest of the house. Despite this, it remains a private space by virtue of its height. "I'm interested in things that are private and pushing them into the public area without causing anyone to be uncomfortable," Kariouk says.

Rooms above ground level are essentially pods that do not touch any of the perimeter walls. Creating those pods -



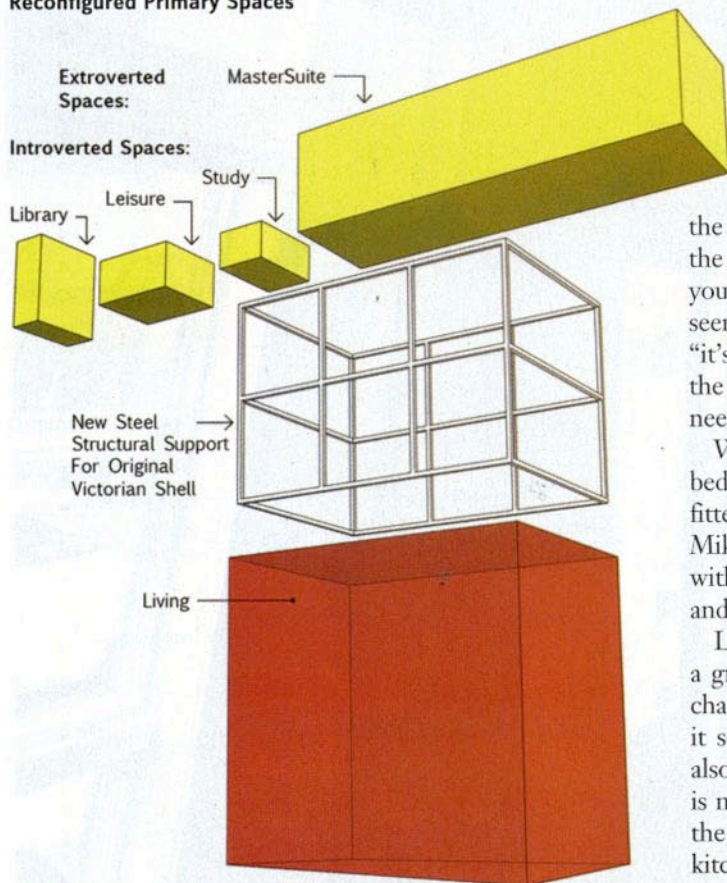
A three-storey-tall hickory-paneled wall serves as the backdrop for the suspended pods. It also provides storage and closets.







## Reconfigured Primary Spaces



a study, den/TV area, and book vault - required the insertion of a steel skeleton inside the home's old brick shell. The steel structure keeps the shell stable and acts as an armature on which the pods hang.

When the structural engineer expressed disbelief about the cantilever, an upset Mike called Kariouk, saying he was ready to walk away from the concept. But Kariouk told him the cantilever would be the defining component of the home's exterior. "When you're standing in the cantilevered space and it starts to seem visually that the canal is at your feet," said Kariouk, "it's going to blow you away." Mike replied: "Okay, that's the end of the discussion. Just get on the tail of the engineer and get it done."

While the cantilevered part of the top floor contains the bedroom, the other half houses a terrace, which is being fitted with a 12-by-30-foot putting green for golf-playing Mike. Among the top floor's other features is a shower with floor-to-ceiling glass that looks out toward the canal and Parliament Hill.

Lower-level highlights include a handheld shower, with a grille and drain, that's used to hose down the squirrel-chasing dog. A hickory-panelled wall rises three-storeys; it serves as the backdrop for the suspended pods and is also used for storage and closets. A six-foot-wide fireplace is mounted on the wall so that it can be seen throughout the lower area, which includes a dining room, living room, kitchen and entry.





The glass-enclosed master bedroom is located in the cantilevered extension - the source of neighbourhood controversy.



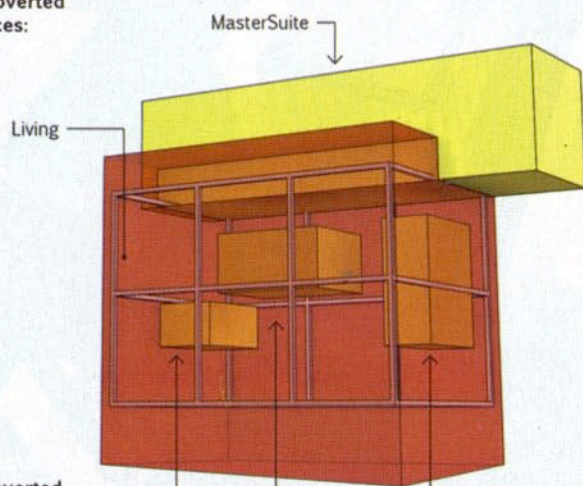
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The ground floor combines dining room, living room, kitchen and entry. A six-foot-wide fireplace helps to visually unite the space.



## Reconfigured Primary Spaces

Extroverted Spaces:



Introverted Spaces:

Study Leisure Library

People either love Echo House or think it's an architectural crime, Kariouk says. Some find it shocking how much the house has been transformed, a criticism Kariouk finds bizarre. He says it's much more consistent to its original scale than the area's many McMansions – rebuilt canal-side homes that are three times the size of their Victorian counterparts. On the other hand, people who love the house have rung the doorbell to give the Dawsons a hug, and have thanked them for being a breath of fresh air in Ottawa's residential market.

Most importantly, though, Mike and Sarah are happy. For, while the novel home may have an increased visibility on the canal, the end result for the Dawsons is an incredibly tranquil and private space. **HC**

Story by Danny Kucharsky  
Photography by Christan Lalonde, Photolux Studio  
The homeowners' names have been changed at their request