

HOMES • RESALE & RENTAL

Editor: Sheila Brady, 596-3709 • sbrady@thecitizen.canwest.com



Above, Paul du Bellet Kariouk used a New York trick of lining window jambs with mirrors to reflect light and suspended linen-backed glass screens that roll across the windows.

Left, tall wood and glass cabinets fitted with interior lights and wheels not only provide storage, but can be arranged for a party, forming lanterns of light and conversation nooks.

Far left, a handy shower at the entrance takes care of muddy boots and poodles.

Pragmatic beauty

Renovated Mayfair condo experiments with light, space and a handy shower for dogs

BY MARIA COOK

Individuals have referred to it as *The Apartment*, as though this Centretown address was a movie title. Or maybe a short story, born of esthetics and economy, complete with epiphanies and surprises.

Located in the elegant 1930s Mayfair building on Metcalfe Street, Apartment 4D is one of Ottawa's most talked about recent renovations.

The designer was Paul duBellet Kariouk, a 40 year old Carleton University architecture professor and transplanted New York City architect.

"I think a house can be something more than just being about warmth and cosiness," says Mr. Kariouk, who lives here with his 100 pound Bernese mountain dog Hannibal.

"Couldn't it be about playful ness? Eroticism? There are so many other human emotions that seem to get excluded from the standard suburban tract house."

Playful? Enter the front door of the fourth-floor condo and you step onto a slatted wood, drainable section of floor. Beside it is a red plaster wall water proofed with marine varnish. Mounted on the wall is a sleek showerhead designed by Danish great Arne Jacobsen.

"There's a slight disconnect in a playful way which I like because people don't know what to make of it," says Mr. Kariouk. "Ultimately, it's completely a pragmatic thing, which is hosing off the muddy dog or muddy shoes."

For years ago, when he was preparing to move to Ottawa from Manhattan to take a teaching position at Carleton, Mr.

Kariouk looked for an apartment with "good bones" that he could transform into a live/work space. Car less, he wanted to be able to walk to work and shopping. Lightly touched with Art Deco details, the seven storey Mayfair Apartments in Centretown was built originally as an apartment hotel aimed at Parliament Hill types. Former inhabitants include figure skater Brian Orser and Kim Campbell, who chose it over 24 Sussex Drive during her brief tenure as prime minister in 1993.

The 175,000 unit that Mr. Kariouk bought had the right spirit, but it immediately presented problems. Long and skinny, it was originally two small apartments that a previous owner had combined into a string of small rooms. The north facing apartment looks into a light well and, even with 18 windows, the far end was oppressively dark.

"I thought I'll take down one wall and then another, and then before you knew it everything was gone," recalls Mr. Kariouk.

"Everything was about trying to amplify natural light or putting in systems of electric lighting that would make the place brighter. That's what led to a series of other experiments."

Mr. Kariouk employed a New York trick of lining window jambs with mirrors to reflect light. Instead of blinds, he devised a set of linen backed glass screens that are suspended from a track and roll back and forth across windows.

"The idea for me is to take common materials and then transform them," he says. "It's not going to Home Depot and buying a finished product. That only leads to conventionality."

When the walls came down, Mr. Kariouk was left with a



PHOTOS BY ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

A curvy tub for two in the master bedroom is filled by water cascading over the side of the concrete sink.

15 foot wide, 80 foot long open space and a question: How to make a bowling lane accommodate all the activities of two adults? Mr. Kariouk's philosophy is that the small spaces can be designed to satisfy daily habits and rituals. He hates "McMansions" honeycombed with separate rooms for every activity from playing pool to gift wrapping. "It's so unnecessary and wasteful," he says. "At the end of the day, there are probably two or three chairs we all use in our houses. We're creatures of habit

and all of the rest just becomes show."

Mr. Kariouk's favourite place to sit and read is a suede brown couch at the front of the apartment.

Standing nearby is a series of tall wood and glass cabinets, designed and built by Mr. Kariouk with flexibility in mind. Fitted with interior lights and wheels, the cabinets not only provide storage, but can be arranged freely for a party, forming lanterns of light and conversation nooks.

The silhouettes of their contents look quite mysterious. When Mr. Kariouk's father visits for a month, they roll them out to wall off a private sleeping area. At the other end, a translucent glass wall backed in red silk screens the master bedroom.

"I don't know if there is anything like it in Ottawa," says interior designer Helma Gansen, who lives in the apartment above. "It took quite a bit of vision and great daring. It's totally unexpected. It's a completely thought through environment. There is also the Quaker approach to take every object and turn it into a decorative piece."

In the centre of the space is the kitchen/work area where Mr. Kariouk prepares meal on an 18 foot long polished concrete counter. Mr. Kariouk also uses the surface for model building. A seven foot long version of the counter is tucked into a window alcove and functions as a computer desk. It can roll out to join the counter if extra space is needed.

The master bathroom, enclosed in a glass wall lined with woods blinds, is a surprise. The broad, flat concrete sink acts like a fountain, overflowing a cascade of water into the tub to fill it. The concrete tub is big enough for two and is lined with a curving wood seat.

When ripping down walls, Mr. Kariouk discovered the serene dipitous beauty of the underside of the floor above—a structure of mesh and rusted concrete that looks like draped red fabric. He left it exposed.

The overall look of the apartment is modern, but Mr. Kariouk's primary motive was not to achieve any particular style. It was designed for the way the couple

lives. A consistent palette of concrete, glass and wood, and a rigorously edited colour scheme of olive green, and rust red, white and natural wood, helps the space accept an imperfect variety of personal possessions.

Furnishings include family heirlooms such as an antique dining table, silver candelabra and 1950s woven chairs. The couch is a contemporary design.

"I'm not interested in making everything match perfectly," he says.

"We all have stuff that we accumulate in our lives."

Mr. Kariouk spent about 90,000 on materials for the renovation, but estimates the true value, including his own labour, to be about 160,000. He was assisted by Chris Davis, a former Carleton student now working with him. Designed by Mr. Kariouk, the tub, kitchen counter and cupboards were made by Frank Prendergast and Lucy Chapman of NeoForm Cabinetry in Ottawa.

Mr. Kariouk's current projects include two lofts in New York, a new house on Linden Terrace in the Glebe, a kitchen renovation in New Edinburgh and a courtyard renovation for SAW gallery.

"There is this misconception that architects just come in and do whimsical, beautiful things," he says.

"It's not that way at all. It's about finding the most beautiful and poetic way to be pragmatic."

For more information, visit www.karioukarchitecture.com.

MARIA COOK writes about architecture and urbanism for the Citizen.