

THE URBAN ELECTRIC C<sup>o</sup>

THE CURRENT

INSPIRED

HAPPENINGS

EYE ON DESIGN

FIRST GLANCE



EYE ON DESIGN: PHILIP MITCHELL

With design offices in Toronto and New York City, Philip Mitchell is a multi-dimensional wonder whose ability to create fresh concepts for every client is rivaled only by his prowess at infusing each of those projects with equal parts timeless appeal and a modern point of view.



**When you think about the concept of layering, what words come to mind?**

*Well, everybody loves that catchphrase "maximalism," right? When I think about layers or that layered look it's that, but it also calls to mind a sense of luxury and richness. It doesn't have to be formal or fancy, though. You can have a very casual, historical-looking piece that also has a lot of layers. I think it's just a matter of adding to a space or an environment bit by bit, through a combination of the architecture, the decor, the accessories, the artwork, the finishes, all of those things.*

*You want to try to create a feeling, and the feeling that we are always trying to create is one that's conducive to people spending time together in a space, enjoying one another and just being at ease.*

**How crucial is lighting to layering?**

*Very. I remember when I was young, one of the very first projects that I worked on was with an incredibly—incredibly—refined woman who was probably in her mid-eighties. She taught me in the beginning how important lighting was. And when I say that, I don't mean the way that they teach you how important the lighting plan is in school, or even when you start to work for a firm and they're showing you how to do a lighting plan, to put in lots of recess lighting and things like that. This woman was brilliant because she said to me, as we were walking around her house, "I just want you to look at something for one second." And then she stood in front of a pot light, and then she stood outside of it so that she wasn't in its glow, and she said, "Tell me that I look good in that light." And I looked at her, and she's in her eighties, you know? And I said, "I totally understand." And as soon as she said that, I got it. A room full of pot lights was not for me. So you would rarely see a pot light in any residence or project that I ever work on, because at the end of the day, there is something that is really interesting about adding a tremendous amount of lighting in a space that's not just conventional. There's something about having a fantastic surface-mount, or several. There's something about having some sconces on the wall. Some picture lights. Swing-arm lamps.*

*Lighting is one of the easiest and most obvious yet overlooked ways to create that extra dimension—and not just with the type of lights, but with the mixture of lights in a room, from top to bottom, side to middle.*





**How do finishes play a role in layering lights?**

*They are so important! From polished brass to heirloom to bronze, there is something that's comfortable, at least to me, about looking at a space that's not all one finish.*

**What do people get wrong about this notion of layering a room or a space? What are some of the frequent mistakes you see?**

*Everything needs to relate to a degree, but at the same time, not be the same. For instance, at the end of the day, we all have eating areas, which need to accommodate people sitting at a similar height—on a chair or a sofa, an ottoman or a bench—and that's important; there's something sort of disarming about having everything very low and having two chairs that are super super tall. At the same time, if everything lines up exactly, it starts to be too, almost like a showroom, you know?*

**Right.**

*A little bit stagnant. I always like to look at variety, shapes, scale, how things apply to one another. Even though each piece is separate, there's still a relationship that has to connect everything together. Often people think, "You know what? We're just gonna put anything in and it's gonna go," and it doesn't really work that way.*







#### Which room or rooms in a house are your favorite?

*My husband, Mark, and I just finished restoring a very old historical house in Nova Scotia, Canada. The original building on the property was from 1770, but the house dates closer to 1795. We spent the past few years restoring it and in the process learned a lot. I am completely attracted to (for whatever reason) lighter, brighter spaces. My husband on the other hand, who has great taste, loves very traditional, sort of stained, darker-feeling rooms and spaces. And so obviously there was a compromise when we were putting things together. Our dining room, for instance, isn't a room that's ever used during the day, so we've gone a little bit deeper and darker there just because we can.*

*In our living room, which we actually do live in, however, it's all board-and-batten planked walls and planked ceilings, and everything has been painted white. It's filled with a plethora of different fabrics and colors and furniture and artwork and lighting. But at the end of the day it's also very light and very bright, with three exposures, two bay windows and French doors. And I just love that at any point during the day.*

#### Is there one public or private home, real or fictional, you'd most like to stay in?

*This is my favorite kind of question because it is really hard to answer! Do you remember the movie *The Perfect Murder* with Michael Douglas and Gwyneth Paltrow? Well, featured in it is this incredible penthouse, in New York, with a variety of styles, just layered and spectacular. It has this incredible Moroccan kitchen, a fantastic living room with an amazing art collection, that foyer with the travertine panels...*

*So incredible.*