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AUGUST 2009

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Return  
to  
Tradition





STYLE TIPS:  
LAYERED TRADITIONAL

- Invest in wood panelling and architectural details.
- Where possible, include special features like coffered ceilings and fluted archways.
- Use a checkered marble floor to inject luxe pattern.
- Be daring with art placement or load up on layers of fantastic art.
- Highlight artwork with custom lighting.

TOP INTERIOR DESIGNER  
PHILIP MITCHELL CONJURES  
A LUXE TRADITIONAL LOOK IN  
A DATED CONDO PENTHOUSE.

*By Jennifer Hughes    Photography by Ted Yarwood*

**P**hilip Mitchell and Mark Narsansky's handsome Toronto penthouse condominium is clearly defined by its stately, classic architecture, and luxurious and well-considered finishes and fixtures. It has all the dignified grace of historic traditional homes four times its age, a regal presence that never goes out of style. But perhaps its most dramatic and eye-catching design feature is its rich layering of furnishings — of paintings and photographs, piles of art and design books and magazines, and of Philip's lush trademark vignettes that include accents like Ming vases, delicate orchids and

OPPOSITE: The condo lacked architectural details, so one of Philip Mitchell's primary goals was to create them. In the living room, he put in a faux fireplace wall, flanked by pretty shelving, as the focal point. The coffee table holds an eclectic vignette that mixes materials, shapes and styles.

**Contractor**, Goldcon; **photo** (over mantel) by Paul Weeks; **abstract painting** by Alexander Jakhnagiev. ABOVE: Gallery-style picture lights play up key art. Task lighting is more flattering than recessed halogens, Philip says. **Edward Burtynsky photo**, Nicholas Metivier Gallery; **chest, lamp**, Patina Antiques; **fabrics** on sofa, Kravet.



Regency-style chairs are a pleasing contrast to the ebony-stained dining table.

**Table, chairs, Patina Antiques; light, RomEla; sculpture, L'Atelier.**



Painting the den a moody brown (in a glam high-gloss finish) gives it a cosy atmosphere. A modern chrome bench, used as a coffee table, is an edgy hit.

**Bench, Ist Dibs; rug, Elte; urn, Patina Antiques.**



To give the main hallway "wow" factor, Philip treated it to a dramatic barrel-vaulted ceiling and detailed woodwork.

**Hanging light, RomEla; picture lights, Sescolite; photographs by Edward Burtynsky, Ned Pratt, Laurin Jeffrey, Mark Narsansky.**



LEFT: The principal bedroom's upholstered walls give it a soft look and deaden outside noises. Stacks of beloved design books and magazines tuck tidily beneath the chest.

**Chest**, Five O Seven Antiques; **lamp**, Decorum; **coverlet**, Elte; **art** (over bed), PI Fine Art; **blazer**, Theodore 1922.

RIGHT: In the 6' x 16' galley kitchen, the fridge, freezer and dishwasher are camouflaged in the custom cabinetry. The upper cabinets were designed with leaded-glass panes to make the tight space look larger.

**Cabinetry**, Bellini; **hardware**, Summerhill Hardware; **faucet**, Taps; **china**, William Ashley China.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Photographs by Susan Darling bring extra sophistication to the luxe marble-lined room, as does the deep tub. **Vanity**, Wollombi Shopfitters; **fixtures**, Amati; **House & Home container**, The Bay.



trinkets collected around the globe. It's a striking personal touch that imbues the home with a timeless elegance. The effect is refined and classic. And yet it's also far from stuffy or overly formal, thanks to Philip's inclusion of incongruously artful pieces like stark modern photographs, chunky 1970s-era acrylic lamps, and even playful souvenir snowglobes from Mark's vast collection — modern hits that put a fresh, updated spin on the traditional look.

Indeed, Philip, a sought-after interior designer who got his start working for distinguished firms Gluckstein Design Planning and Powell & Bonnell before striking out on his own five years ago, has a keen eye for the mix. (Mark owns an ad agency specializing in travel.) But equally important here was his focused attention to detail, which he called on even before redesigning the condo from top to toe.

It's hard to imagine that this silk purse was, just a few years ago, a sow's ear. Only a true style visionary could have seen the potential in the condo when Philip bought it back in 2001 complete with wall-to-wall pink shag carpeting, pink baseboards, low stippled ceilings and a chopped-up floorplan. But it suited Philip just fine. His goal had always been to hand-pick a condo on one of the top levels of a 1960s or '70s building where he would have the opportunity to raise false ceilings, heighten doorways and rearrange floorplans — to essentially overhaul the unit and turn it into an elegant pied-à-terre for the pair's weekdays in the city (they spend weekends at their vacation home on Lake Erie and frequently jet overseas for work). And despite its shortcomings,

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## RETURN TO TRADITION

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it offered superb views of the city's skyline and was a mere five-minute walk from his midtown office.

After gutting the condo, Philip had the ceilings raised, from a conventional eight feet to an airier 9-1/2. He rearranged the floorplan, moving the kitchen and taking out a second bedroom to create a more open main living space and allow for a larger principal bedroom and bath, and a den.

Then he began the intensive job of adding layer upon layer of sophisticated style, starting with the creation of good bones. He gave the rooms architectural refinement in the form of extensive panel mouldings, deep cornices, high baseboards — and even a dramatic barrel-vaulted ceiling in the entryway that was inspired by a friend's 18th-century home in London, England — until the space read more like an English country house than a 1970s condo.

To anchor the enlarged living room, he had a new faux fireplace wall carefully crafted, outfitting it with a generous mantel, slate surround, flanking bookshelves and a firebox painted in sooty black despite the fact that the fireplace isn't functional (it is wired to accommodate an electrical insert if needed later on). Nonetheless, the regal unit is just what the room needed as a bold focal point.

In the kitchen and bathroom, beautifully detailed custom cabinetry, paired with expanses of Bianco Carrara, Grigio Carnico and Bardiglio Nuvolato marbles, gives the rooms a luxe elegance. Parquet floors camouflaged by a dark walnut stain, and new marble floors in the kitchen, entry and bathroom further the condo's stunning new persona. To highlight the new extra-tall doors throughout the condo and give them more prominence, Philip coated them all in a deep black-blue hue.

In furnishing the spaces, he was equally precise in his choices

and planning. Large pieces like sofas, drapes and rugs are done in layers of neutral (tone-on-tone shades of cream, beige, pale grey-greens and browns) and possess classic silhouettes. Walls throughout are painted in complex custom colours. "The living room is a creamy colour that defies description," Philip says. "It changes completely with the light, depending on the time of day." Pieces from Philip's own new to-the-trade furniture line are mixed with antiques, and vintage and contemporary pieces.

Excellent design notwithstanding, a small home rarely "works" if it doesn't incorporate well-planned storage, and Philip met this challenge with aplomb. Using dressers, like the vintage Baker pieces flanking the sofa in the living room, as side tables affords essential hidden storage in a number of the condo's rooms. In a more unique manoeuvre, Philip also cleverly concealed shallow storage drawers in behind the toekicks in the kitchen and stores less-used items like fine silverware here.

Of course, what brings true personality and warmth to the condo is that final layer: Philip and Mark's rich collections. Passionate about art, the pair see no reason to stick to any one style or subject, though certainly contemporary Canadian artists are well represented. One wall might be home to a simple black-and-white photograph hung beneath a series of über-traditional gilt-framed oil landscapes. "I don't like to follow any rules when displaying art," says Philip. "I like it to look like it was all collected and hung over time, which, for the most part, it was." The same goes for Philip's delightful vignettes, which proudly incorporate many treasures picked up on their world travels. "Rather than some cheesy souvenir, we usually buy a trinket at a flea market or a piece of art," he explains. His fresh take on traditional style means that almost anything can make it into the mix and his design vision means it all gets layered in seamlessly. **H&H**

## LOFTY AMBITION

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everyday tasks. "With kids and our lifestyle, we knew we would spend most of our time in the kitchen, living and dining areas," says Josh.

Again, by chance, a flea market shopping trip to Amsterdam proved fruitful when Christiane came across a trove of wide-plank European oak floors from an abandoned factory. Deciding on the spot to have them shipped home, she then used their beautifully worn, green-grey hue as the basis of the loft's colour scheme. "New York used to be called New Amsterdam," observes Christiane. "Both cities are seaports with similar latitudes, so they have the same kind of light."

Her palette choice was also practical. "I must have rubbed every single swatch of upholstery fabric on the dog's back," she admits, laughing. "He's the perfect colour, and now no matter what he lies on, his hair doesn't show."

Subtle old world touches — a classic palette, those chamfered beams, the hand-finished plaster fireplace, a glittering Beaux-Arts chandelier — soften the loft's modern aesthetic in a pitch-perfect mix that uniquely captures Josh and Christiane's easy elegance. "The best part is we didn't sacrifice any of our original design ideas for practicality," says Josh. He adds that while it may seem counterintuitive, a loft is brilliant for family living. Gracious and frequent entertainers, he and Christiane often host friends and their small children for long, wine-filled lunches. Thanks to the loft's open plan, the kids play, easily observed, while the adults linger at the 14-foot mahogany table. "The openness is a perfect environment," he says. "The kids love to ride their bikes and chase each other around." And on weekdays, Josh likes to start the morning by dancing with the kids at breakfast before walking with his old Lab, Jake, the three blocks to Dwell's office. Sounds perfect. And take it from me — it is. **H&H**