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Creative Spaces: Kate & David Daniels and One of Canada's Most Notable Art Deco Homes, Part I

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The Daniels' spectacular collection of art, furniture and light fixtures fills a home that is just as breathtaking in form. As stylish as it is green and sustainable, the ingenious 'reimagination' of its landmark Art Deco nascence is a testament to David, Kate and team's mission to preserve the old, while weaving in the new.

Part I: The Broad Strokes

Who: David Daniels is the principal in real estate investment company, Daniels Capital Group, as well as [sustainable.TO](#), a “green” architecture & building firm. David is also Executive Producer of [The Acting Up Musical Theatre Company](#) and the Glenn Gould Lectures, and is involved in TV, film and theatre projects with various partners in Canada and the US.



David Daniels in his dining room

Kate Daniels is principal of [Daniels/Stephenson](#), a public relations and production company. Kate is also a board member of the Canadian Film Centre and the Governor General Awards Foundation. Most notably, Kate is super-mom to her and David's two children, aged five and seven! Both Kate and David are involved in a number of philanthropic projects around health, culture and education, which is a whole other (several) conversation...



Dining room

Paul Dowsett is an [Architect and principal at sustainable.TO](#). Since graduating with distinction from the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, in over two decades of local and international environmentally-sensitive residential, commercial and institutional architectural practice, Paul has encountered so many Clients confused by green-information overload that he has started sustainable.TO /architecture + building, to assist others make sense of it all, and add "green" and practical value to Clients' properties. Paul was principal architect on the "reimagining" of Daniels' home.



Original terrazzo staircase

What: Originally designed as a single family home by Mackenzie Waters -- Architect and was awarded the only RAIC Award in 1935 for a view of the north elevation -- the home is described as a composition of plain masses. It's a rare example of domestic exterior art deco architecture in Toronto. As Tim Morawetz, Author and publisher of *Art Deco Architecture in Toronto*, notes, "1920s and 30s homes rarely featured Art Deco styling on the exterior for the reason of not wishing to appear too modern, showy or not fitting into the neighbourhood."

The landmark piece of Toronto's Art Deco heritage was sensitively transformed into a singular achievement of contemporary living, combines original details and materials with green, sustainable building and architectural practices.

Where: The premier neighbourhood of South Hill in Toronto.



Top of original sweeping staircase, with original Art Deco railings

Why: David was awed by this extraordinary art deco “house on the hill” for years, as he already lived on the street. When it went on sale, he feared that another rare piece of Toronto’s Art Deco heritage was about to disappear; that the house would be torn down, subdivided or so thoroughly modernized that all its original character would be lost. Having acquired it, David and team went out of their way to save a significant piece of Toronto's architectural heritage.



One end of the foyer

Rana Florida: Tell us about this epic project!

Paul Dowsett: In 2005, when purchased by David Daniels, the home required a major overhaul. It was important to the Daniels' to rejuvenate the neighbourhood, rather than allowing the property to be razed or cut up into multi-family homes. We had to provide for the needs of a 21st century family, while respecting what the original building had to offer. Including a drastic improvement to energy efficiency, we saw the home as a showcase of sustainable thinking and practice. In 2006 the project was awarded an RAIC Grant for the Incorporation of Renewable Energy Strategies ... making a nice symmetry -- 71 years after its RAIC award in 1935.



Walkthrough

David Daniels: Having tried to do eco-friendly renovations twice before, there wasn't the abundance of building materials, technology or experienced professionals: I just couldn't get there. Combining restoration, environmental technologies and a notable collaboration between architect and client, it seems that the third time's a charm. Original materials were used in-situ and replaced materials were then re-used whenever possible. The glass additions, inspired by Pierre Chareau's early 1930s "Maison de Verre" are in stark but sympathetic contrast to the original building distinguishing original from new. The project was fondly nicknamed the "echo of deco" or the "eco of deco".



Powder room

RF: *What did you manage to save of the original structure?*

Paul Dowsett: In 2005 many of the original features of the home were in disrepair or, at least, were showing their 70 years. Conservation work at these features was overseen by Coheze Developments Ltd., the Project and Construction Managers.



Exterior brick work with metal shades

PD: Key amongst this conservation work was the brick exterior of the home. The original brickwork was cleaned as gently as possible with simple soap and water, not to further damage the previously sand-blasted surfaces. Inside this brick, the new insulation is an open-cell, bio-based foam insulation and interior lime-based plaster, installed without vapour barrier, which allow the exterior walls to breathe (albeit very slowly) seasonally with the interior or the exterior as required, prolonging the life of the original brickwork. With the reused bricks, the colour, texture and composition of the original mortar has been painstakingly matched.



Original doors and windows repurposed into cabinetry

PD: The original, inefficient, single-pane, steel-framed doors & windows have been carefully removed, salvaged, and redeployed as a new door into the garage at the porte-cochere and as interior design elements in the form of cabinet and closet doors.



Glass light shelves visible above interior window panes

PD: New state-of-the-art, metal-framed windows were installed in the original punched window openings. State-of-the-art glass and metal were an integral part of the art deco language, so it is appropriate that state-of-the-art glass and metal are being used here today. Exterior metal sunshades protect the home from the high summer sun, allowing the lower winter sun to enter unimpeded. Interior glass light shelves reflect the sun's rays onto the ceiling increasing the penetration of natural daylight, reducing the need to turn on electric lights. Mr Daniels states, "What I like about this [technology] is that it's completely low-tech -- it's just a matter of doing your calculations".



Original domed foyer (restored)

PD: We painstakingly rehabilitated the original, and installed new plaster walls, ceilings and details, following full-scale mockup tests of deco-inspired mouldings for the principal rooms to complete the decor, while masking the new ductwork. The designers and craftsmen returned again and again to the original domed foyer for inspiration and for templates. The original quarter-sawn white oak hardwood floors were patched with salvaged pieces where required and restored. Some original plumbing fixtures were salvaged, refurbished and reinstalled.



Living room

PD: Because the home's major interior deco features stopped just beyond the foyer, which seems to be a reversal of the trend at the time (see Morawetz above), this project 're-imagined' what might have been, and has carried a 21st century interpretation of deco-sympathetic trim, mouldings and finishes throughout the existing building. Key features offered by the deco home, include:

- Restrained but rhythmic composition of plain masses, expressed in banded buff brick;
- Rhythmic punched window openings in this brick facade;
- Protective porte-cochere [porch cover/portico];
- Deco door and arched transom leading to a chequered marble-floored entryway;
- Domed and sculpted plaster foyer;
- Deco-profile principal baseboards;
- Sweeping terrazzo staircase and metal railings;
- Quarter-sawn white oak hardwood floor throughout;
- Amazing sprung-hardwood floor ballroom; and
- Period sundial on the south facade.



Living room

RF: *Can you speak about some of the special eco features?*

PD: Additions and visible sustainable features are carefully conceived to be harmonious with the deco-styling, while being very much of our own time, to distinguish what's old from what's new. This entire orchestration artfully masks the cutting-edge sustainable features of the re-imagined home, including:

- A decentralized HVAC system with geothermal and solar-thermal renewable-energy inputs;
- Open-cell, bio-based foam insulation and interior lime-based plaster;
- All plaster painted with no-VOC paint;
- New double and triple-glazed thermally-broken, metal-framed, low-E windows;
- and
- Rainwater collection for garden irrigation.



Master bedroom

RF: *David, how did you decide on the team?*

DD: Believe it or not I found the architect, Paul Dowsett from Scott Morris Architect through an internet search! In-person interviews, of course, followed. The team was assembled from personal recommendations, previous experience and good old instinct.



Garden with covered lap pool

RF: What was the biggest challenge you overcame during renovation?

DD: Fitting all the “green” initiatives together...in a renovation ...as opposed to new construction...involved a lot of extra planning and research...a learning curve for all of us, but well worth it!

Stay tuned for [Part II: Art, Light, More Rooms and Chairs -- So Many Chairs!](#)

