



Creative Spaces: Cold Office Space Turns Sweeping, Luxurious Living in Downtown Toronto

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Two business leaders transform an expansive, cold office in downtown Toronto into a luxurious but minimalist living space, with soaring ceilings, dramatic city views in every direction, and ingenious but subtle design details.



By: *Rana Florida*, [Creative Class Group](#); [Special Contributor to HGTV.ca](#)

Who: **Dennis Keefe**, a marketing and communications consultant, and **John Jordan**, a leadership development consultant.

What: The two-level, 3800 sq ft space is in a small condo building that has been zoned for both commercial and residential use. Prior to Dennis and John, it was being used as office space. There are two bedrooms, two and a half baths, a second-floor mezzanine and rooftop terrace.



Dennis Keefe

Where: Downtown Toronto near the city's tony Yorkville area.

Why: The space really soars! Each room has its own unique character while maintaining a sense of continuity and flow. It is at once warm and expansive; intimate and perfect for entertaining.



Rana Florida: *How did you and John meet? How many homes have you lived in?*

Dennis Keefe: John and I met in the U.S. over twenty years ago, while we were on vacation. We each have consulting businesses, mine in corporate brand strategy and John's in leadership development. We have traveled extensively in those years and I guess that has influenced the kind of spaces we like to live in. This is our third home in Toronto, and this one is definitely the most modern.



RF: This space is quite unique. How high are the ceilings?

DK:The main floor is mostly an open living space with kitchen, living room and dining room-
-all distinct rooms, yet open to each other. The second floor is really more like a mezzanine
that overlooks the main floor so as to ceiling heights, I never thought about it before....the
main space soars.



RF: *You decided to go completely modern. Tell us about your design decisions.*

DK: Over the years I think our sense of everything has become more refined, more minimal. We have pared our spaces down to just a few objects and art that we enjoy, and sometimes we will rotate them so there are different things on display. I like very uncluttered spaces – sometimes to a point where people ask if we have finished unpacking!



RF: *Describe the renovation. What did you keep? What did you change?*

DK: When I first saw the building I was captivated by the black lacquer and all the chrome and mirror everywhere. It was such a change from all the beige and brown many designers are using. So the space had a real '70s glamorous feel and I wanted to preserve some of that style. Of course, I still wanted to renovate just about every surface. I salvaged all the black lacquer doors, the glass and chrome railings and some of the mirror. The bedrooms, stairs and mezzanine all had old pile carpet so we laid new hardwood throughout, and stained it very dark to match the existing old hardware in the main living space. One of the biggest changes took place in the master ensuite area. It was a rabbit's warren of little doors and black cubicles so we completely opened that up.



RF: *Your kitchen is terrific for entertaining. What materials were used?*

DK: The kitchen was the biggest change in the layout. When we bought it was only half this size and the rest of the space was used as a dining room. I thought it was more interesting to move the dining room under the sloped windows to have the city view, which freed up a huge area for the kitchen. We do love to cook and entertain, so the cooking area is to one end (with a hidden pantry behind the stove) and the bar area is on the opposite end, with built-in ice maker, refrigerator draws, bar sink, etc.

DK: I guess most people would say the large double island is the centerpiece of the room because of its sheer size. It is made of walnut and Caesarstone divided by stainless steel. But for me the most interesting feature of the kitchen is the curved soffit over the long counter. With no upper cabinets this was a brilliant idea from the architect as a way to reprise the wood in the cabinets (Anigre) and at the same time hide the air vents and overhead lights.



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

DK: The biggest challenge was getting all the equipment in and out of a small building. We have a private elevator to our suite so that helped with some of the routine small things. For the rooftop terrace we simply hired a massive crane and had the furniture and BBQ hoisted to the roof. It was quite an experience having to shut down a lane of our street on a Saturday morning.

RF: Who was your designer and architect and how did you decide on the team?

DK: I had worked with Bill Mockler from [Drawing Room Architects \(DRA\)](#) at our previous home and he was the first person I called. In fact Bill came along with me to see several prospective properties. I don't think most people realize the importance of having a good relationship with your architect or designer. On this project the architect was Stuart Watson. And as DRA offers interior design services I worked closely with Stuart to come up with the final interior design plan.



RF: A major feature of your home is all the skylights, how is it living in all this light?

DK: The large living room skylight, which is really a sloped glass ceiling, is hard to miss! In fact the first thing everyone asks is, is it too much during a sunny day. And while the room is flooded with light all day long, there are protective coatings on the glass so it never feels like you're living under a glare. We have the entire two floors so we have windows on all sides and can watch the light change from dawn to dusk.



RF: *The loft creates such a sense of space. How is it used?*

DK: The second level – which is really a half floor that overlooks the main floor – is one of the things that drew us most to the space. It provides a wonderful continuation of space for when we're entertaining a crowd. Otherwise, we have an office there and a media room of sorts where we watch movies on the large screen TV. John is a bit of an audiophile so we also have a high-end stereo there. And the rest of the floor is taken up with laundry, another powder room and a utility storage.



RF: *Your master bathroom is beautiful! Tell us about it.*

DK: Everyone loves a big bathroom I guess. When we bought the property the master bathroom had a small room for the WC, and a small shower. There seemed to be doors upon doors. So we removed everything in that space and floated calaccata marble everywhere. The shower and WC are now enclosed in Starfire glass which allows you to have glass without the green tinge. And the mirrored wall is actually built like a large piece of furniture. On the opposite side are secret doors to push to reveal a shoe closet!



RF: *What is your favorite room in the house?*

DK: I think I'd have to say the master bedroom. The architect had a brilliant idea of reorienting the room so the bed backed up to the living room with windows on each side that you can actually see through to the living room. (Motorized blinds can create privacy at the push of a button.) And he recommended the curved zebra wood wall that separates the bedroom from the bath. It's a beautiful feature, almost a piece of furniture really.

