



Creative Spaces: Two Eras Collide for a Dramatic Victorian Transformation in Toronto

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An award winning architect and arts philanthropist transform a Victorian gem, which formerly housed both a missionary society and a law firm, into a light-filled minimalist showpiece with historical detail. The elegant yet warm and inviting space is not so much the result of a renovation, as it is a conversation between two architectural styles, more than 100 years apart.



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

Who: Philanthropist **Victoria Jackman** is Executive Director of the Hal Jackman Foundation for the Arts. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund and is active on the Contemporary and Photographic Curatorial Committees at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She is Past-President of the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery.



Victoria Jackman

Bruce Kuwabara is a Founding Partner of Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg Architects and is internationally recognized as one of Canada's leading architects. He is the 2006 recipient of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Gold Medal, the country's highest honour bestowed on an individual in the field. His firm has earned distinction with 11 Governor General's Awards.

What: A 5,500 sq. foot heritage Victorian home in the heart of the Annex, with three stories, four bedrooms and five baths.



Courtyard

Rana: *You live in one of my all time favorite neighbourhoods, the Annex in Toronto, on a beautiful tree-lined street with historic homes. Tell us about the neighbourhood and the house.*

Victoria Jackman: I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in Toronto. I love the vibrant community and the wonderfully eclectic mix of restaurants, cafes and shops. I live a short walk from the University and many of the city's great cultural institutions like the Royal Ontario Museum, the Gardiner Museum and the Royal Conservatory of Music.



Sitting room: Le Corbusier's "LC2" collection sofas for Cassina; glass and bronze coffee table by Carlo Scarpa; Mounted wallpaper by An Te Liu titled "Pattern Language: Levittown White"

VJ: I had my eye on this house well before it even went up for sale. It has an interesting pedigree. It was built in 1894 by Edmunde Burke, who was a prominent Toronto architect at the time. It was commissioned by a lawyer for himself and his young American wife. Upon her death, the house was given to the Baptist Church and it became a Women's Missionary Society. They held religious services in the living room. Years later the house was acquired by several lawyers who converted it into a dozen small offices. It was in really rough shape when I bought it, but one could see the potential for something beautiful.



Living room: "Charles" sofa by Antonio Citterio for B & B Italia; white oak "Xilos" coffee table from Maxalto; Maxalto "Clio" armchairs; tripod lamp from BDDW; stool in gold foil by Marcel Wanders; bench designed by Florence Knoll, 1954

Rana: You decided to go completely modern and minimalist. Tell us about your overall vision for the home.

VJ: I think historical minimalism is a more apt description. Despite working with an architect with a clearly modernist aesthetic, we tried to salvage as many period details as possible. We wanted to open up the house, bring in light, and make it contemporary, while being respectful of the historical character. This was the biggest challenge of the renovation, to try to straddle both worlds.



Entrance: Photographs by John Massey from his “Adam and Eve” series

Bruce Kuwabara: I see the contemporary additions and interventions as a dialogue between two architects working in different languages over 100 years apart. A gradual transition was orchestrated from the front living room which expresses the volume and details of the original architecture to the dining pavilion, which is a completely new addition and contemporary in all of its details. The interior is uncluttered and serene. It works wonderfully for family dinners and large gatherings because it has good flow and spaces that are connected, generous and open.

Rana: *Describe the renovation. What did you keep? What did you change? How long did it take?*

BK: The renovation took about 18 months. The house had been subdivided into a rabbit's warren of small rooms. We wanted to reclaim the beauty and proportions of the principal rooms and open up the house to a walled garden. We kept the beautiful stained glass windows, as well as the existing central staircase and several fireplace mantles.



Family room: Sectional by Rodolfo Dordoni for Minotti; white oak “Xilos” coffee table by Antonio Citterio for Maxalto; “Bolla” floor lamps by Michael Sodeau for Gervasoni; “Lem” bar stools by Lapalma

BK: New crown moldings, base boards and window trim were made to match the profiles of the original plaster and wood details. The coal-burning fireplaces were enlarged and converted to wood-burning ones. We replaced all the windows, matching the profiles of the originals. The house had sagged and settled over the last 100 years, so the floors had to be restructured and leveled. The roofing was replaced, and the exterior brick and stone were re-pointed. We added new stone stairs and a flamed black granite driveway that creates a generous sense of entrance.



Master bath: tub by Waterworks

VJ: The aim was to create a relaxing home for the family that would be warm, elegant and an oasis of calm. I wanted the house to feel like a retreat. We chose a fairly monochromatic palette. The floors are a luminous white oak. All the walls are white. I love the serenity of white and the way it reflects light. Of course, it is also the perfect backdrop for an art collection.



Bedroom: “Charles” bed by Antonio Citterio for B&B Italia; Molteni & Co.’s “606” night tables; Knoll’s “Krefeld” table by Mies van der Rohe; “Thomas” armchair by Antonio Citterio for Flexform; photograph over the fireplace is “Snow Angels” by Justine Kurland

Rana: *The kitchen seems to be the hearth of the home and looks clean and modern yet is completely functional. Tell us about it.*

BK: The original kitchen was very small and dark. Two walls were demolished to create a large open kitchen and family room. We installed a bulthaup kitchen which is not only a high performance cooking space but is also very beautiful. It is great for day-to-day living as well as for dinner parties and events.



Kitchen and family room: bulthaup b3 kitchen system with anodized aluminum wall panels, matte lacquer cabinetry; countertops in stainless steel and quartz; bar top in white oak; (on counter in red) Vitra’s “Mother and Child” tray by Alexander Girard

VJ: As in so many modern households, the kitchen has become the centre of our family life. So much of our activity revolves around the large centre island. I love bulthaup’s design. Every aspect of it has been meticulously detailed. It is like a functional work of art.



Dining room: Custom dining room table by bulthaup; Hans Wegner's 1949 "Wishbone" chairs; photograph (right) "Orchard View, Late Spring, Vitis vinifera, Wisteria, 2004" by Scott McFarland; far wall installation by Michah Lexier, "Fill in the Blanks (72 characters)"

Rana: The dining room looks out onto a private green filled courtyard, which brings in a lot of natural sunlight. Was outdoor space an important component in the overall design?

VJ: Yes, we wanted the addition to really engage with the outdoors.



Patio furniture by Rodolfo Dordoni for Roda

BK: The one-story dining pavilion has large sliding doors that open up into a private courtyard garden creating a fluid transition between indoor and outdoor space. The overhang provides protection from the sun and rain. It also blocks the view of the apartment tower and frames the view toward the park, creating a porch. We built a steel and stained wood fence that is 8 feet high. It creates privacy as well as a very elegant backdrop for an outdoor room, while maintaining views of the sky and the upper boughs of mature trees in the park next door.



Living room: white oak "Xilos" coffee table from Maxalto; Maxalto "Clio" armchairs; stool in gold foil by Marcel Wanders; bench designed by Florence Knoll, 1954; original fireplace mantel; "Joker" vases in gold foil by Nicole Aebischer for B&B Italia. Kitchen: on counter, Vitra's "Mother and Child" tray by Alexander Girard.

Rana: *Where did you source your furniture?*

VJ: I like timeless, modern pieces with clean lines that are eminently comfortable and functional. There are many pieces by Italian designer Antonio Citterio, as well as some iconic design pieces by Le Corbusier, Hans Wegner and Florence Knoll. For the family room I chose a relaxed sectional from the Minotti Andersen line. All the furniture was sourced from stores in Toronto: Kiosk, Interior Elements, Italinteriors and Hollace Cluny.



Sitting room detail

Rana: *Can you tell us about the wallpaper in the living room?*

VJ: This is a work by An Te Liu made from hand-printed silkscreens on paper. It is an aerial view of the late 40s Levittown housing development on Long Island. The photographic image is manipulated into symmetrical diamond patterns to appear as if you are looking through a kaleidoscope. I find it mesmerizing and refreshingly ornamental in an otherwise minimal room.



Hall: Photographs (left) by Arnaud Maggs “Travail des enfants dans l’industrie 9 et 9 bis”; photographs (right) by Angela Grauerholz, “Privation” series

Rana: *Tell us about your dramatic art collection.*

VJ: Almost all the art is by contemporary Canadian artists, many of whom are good friends. I have been collecting primarily photography for the last 10 years and have wonderful pieces by Arnaud Maggs, John Massey, Angela Grauerholz, Scott McFarland and Adad Hannah. Lately I have been acquiring more conceptual work and video. Micah Lexier recently did an enigmatic installation in the dining room made of lines of laser cut steel.



Stairway: Stained glass portrait of Carrie Holman, wife of the home's original owner, 1894, artist unknown; mobile by Robert Fones, "Levianthan #3"

Rana: *I love the stain glass window on the stairwell. Was that original?*

VJ: The stained glass was commissioned in 1894 by the original owner. It is a portrait of his wife, Carrie, whom he obviously adored. I think of her as the patron saint of the house.

