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APRIL/MAY 2010

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A MEANINGFUL MIX

From Paul Newman to a New York City eatery, two designers find their inspiration in people, places and a few idiosyncratic pieces

TEXT BARB SLIGL PHOTOGRAPHY MARCOS ARMSTRONG

Taxidermy may not typically inspire swanky interior design, but for this sleek space in Vancouver it was the somewhat unorthodox starting point. Designers Peter Wilds and Darci Illich of The Cross Design & Decor in Vancouver's Yaletown neighbourhood – a stomping ground for the stylish set – were in Manhattan dining at Freemans (a hip eatery on the Lower East Side) when the inspiration struck.

“There was taxidermy and antlers everywhere,” says Wilds, “and we were so inspired by this space and the spirit and the vibe of the crowd there.”

The design grew from there, which the pair based on creating a livable, chic urban home. The duo's client – Townline Group of Companies, a Vancouver-based developer – wanted a display suite for its new, luxe Yaletown condos, which, staying true to Vancouver's “green” roots, feature eco-friendly flourishes from FSC-certified flooring to low-flow faucets. (See sidebar on page 38.)

The developer was familiar with the look of

The Cross and wanted Wilds and Illich to recreate the boutique's same warm, livable mix of modern vintage. The specs also included the usual condo musts, like a TV over the fireplace, but while that condo standard may not have been Wild's and Illich's first choice, they worked it into their vision of the savvy, urban couple they imagined living there.

They even had a photo, clipped from a magazine, of a shoe designer and his interior designer wife – their dream couple – that became the focus of the design concept. (Serendipity struck as Wilds and Illich left that Manhattan restaurant: walking towards the restaurant was the real-life couple featured in the magazine!)

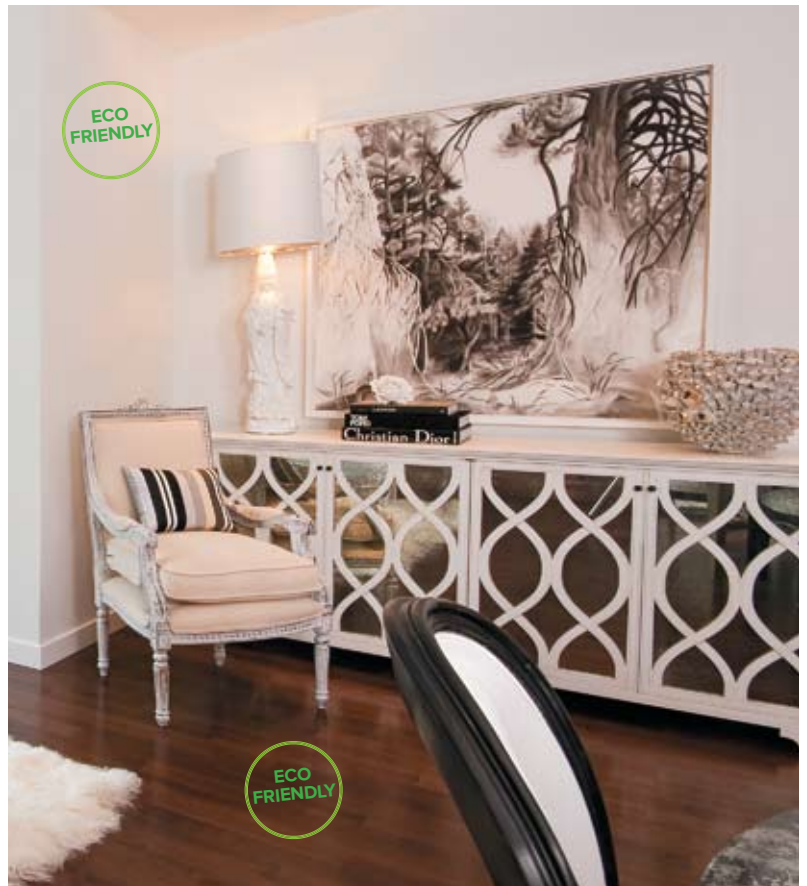
And back at the Yaletown condo, playing on the tube over the hearth (figuratively, of course) was *A Long Hot Summer* with Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward – another inspirational couple. Wild's and Illich's design came together imaging Newman and Woodward as youthful twentysomethings on the screen. [It was] “a

balance point between a relaxed, lounge-y vibe and an elegant vibe,” says Wilds.

That ambience permeates the entire space. There's elegant and edgy interplay everywhere. “We're all about the mix of things old and new, elegant with a bit of edge, modern with something classic,” he explains.

The design developed around seemingly opposing elements, like the classic chandelier hanging over the mirrored dining table, set against the bohemian brick wall in the loft-like space. The condo's (and that dream couple's) character comes out of the juxtaposition: “Something feminine and sparkly and beautiful against something that's very rough,” says Wilds. Elements

THE NEW BOHEMIAN Chandeliers and brick walls (previous page) make for great design tension, as do other opposites, like the antlers and Moroccan pouf (below). Glam touches include the mirrored sideboard. ECO FACTOR Low-VOC Eco Spec paint on the walls and FSC-certified engineered birch floors.



IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES



eco elements

This condo's green-minded theme goes deeper than just the decor and The Cross' ethos to buy well and buy once, thus avoiding throwaway objects. Townline has initiated a "Down to Earth" commitment in all of its developments, which involves using sustainable materials throughout the interior as well as in the construction. » In the kitchen, built-in sliding recycling bins make sorting a breeze. There's no in-sink disposal; this often-standard appliance puts a strain on the already stressed water treatment system (in many parts of the world they're illegal). » The wood veneer in the kitchen cabinets and the engineered-birch hardwood floor are both from FSC-certified wood, plus the floor is installed without glue, which means that there is little or no off-gassing. » Even the landscaping surrounding the building showcases native West Coast plants, which not only need less maintenance and resources but also provide year-round beauty. Green does look good. □



ECO FACTOR
FSC-certified wood veneer on the kitchen cabinets; CaesarStone counters that meet ISO 14001 standards; Energy Star™ appliances (above and left), plus what's *not* present: a water-wasting in-sink disposal system.

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were added to "go with" or "go against," creating tension. Chic antlers were mounted on the wall alongside Ikea shelves. A Moroccan pouf and a minimalist sofa were placed together atop a Mongolian goat rug. "It's the classic with the unexpected."

The monochromatic backdrop to this mix was also deliberate. The palette – greys, whites, creams, black – appeals to both the male and female sides of the couple. "And grey is such a new, modern neutral," says Wilds. "It has a chic element with a bit edge to it."

Mirrored surfaces add another important element to that neutral palette. The headboard in the master bedroom is a huge floor mirror turned on its side. Going with such big-scale pieces in a condo is bold (and, again, in tune with that savvy couple), and a king-size bed in

a Yaletown condo makes an unabashed, luxurious statement.

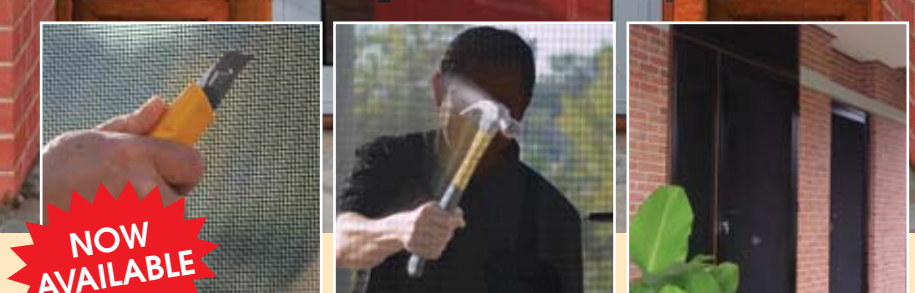
"I'm always looking to see how you make a room look and feel bigger," says Wilds. The large-scale charcoal-on-paper artwork (which also feeds into the palette) brings the "great" to the great room. As does the grid of black-and-white photography – 21 framed photos from Paris circa 1962 – to the master bathroom. It's another big, bold statement along an entire wall in the bathroom. And the Parisian photography is in sync with the aura of that chic couple.

Some of these riskier design elements were possible because the condo was a display suite and Townline was willing to explore more daring design choices. But anyone can infuse a bit of risk into a home. As Wilds puts it: "I say no rules, really, at the end of the day."

Of course, you can't pretend you're in an Edwardian building or a French chateau, adds Wilds – especially in the boxy standard of Vancouver condos – but you can bring elements or the spirit of that chateau into a modern space.

More importantly, and especially as part of today's greater eco consciousness, it's about being mindful of your living space. "Buy well, buy once," says Wilds. Find the best pieces that your budget allows, that stand the test of time and earn their place in your home.

If you're not sure, don't buy. "It's like your wardrobe," says Wilds. "We're trying to find the pieces you love that coordinate well together." Again, it's all about the mix and contrast. It's akin to pairing a \$20 T-shirt with \$400 shoes. "That's what makes something modern and sexy



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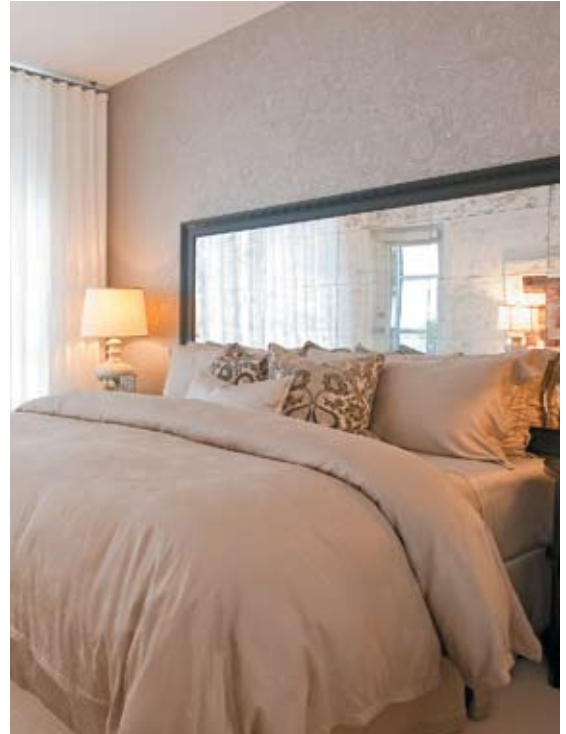
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GO BIG, GO BOLD Large-scale items, like a king-size bed and a floor mirror as headboard, add drama. **MAKING ROOM** An “office” is squeezed into a narrow space. Neutral tones follow the colour scheme. **PARIS JE’TAIME** Simply framed photos of Paris paired with sparkly sconces add glamour to the master bathroom. **ECO FACTOR** Low-flow faucets.



and relevant; deliberately mixing these things,” says Wilds.

It’s as if he’s describing that couple again, whether Newman and Woodward or the Manhattan design couple walking to dinner. Next time you’re out for a bite, look around, draw inspiration, and see if there’s something to incorporate into your home. Even if it is taxidermy. ■

