

AVANT GARDE DESIGNER DIGS

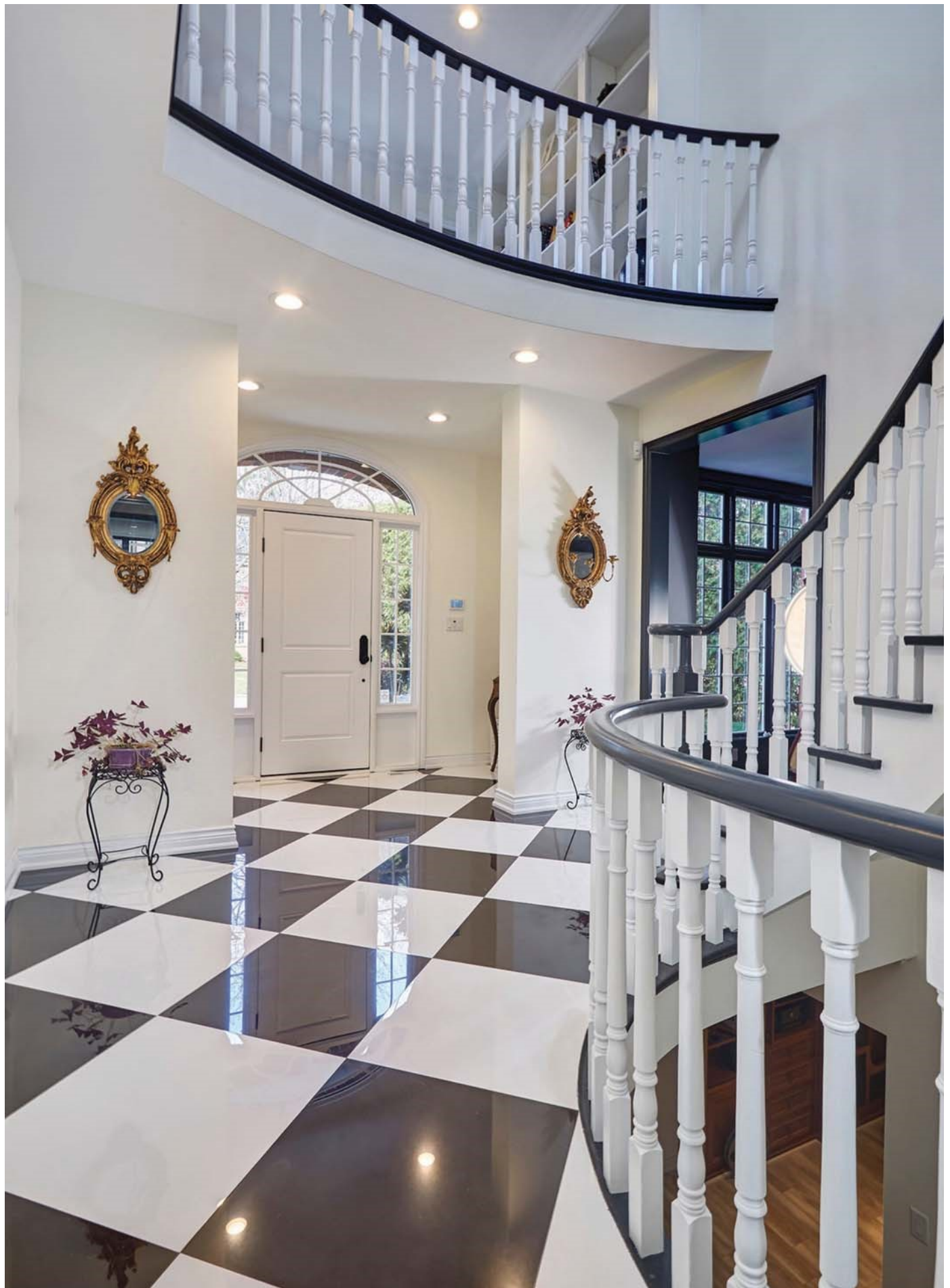
When you're an aspiring fashion designer, it stands to reason that you would want your home to reflect your own creative sensibility. So the owner of this Toronto residence called on Barbini interior designer Vanja Stepanek to create the avant-garde home of her dreams. She had seen and loved one of Barbini's recent projects, Vanja says.

"It was a fun and different project to work with someone who is inspired by history and has an appreciation for architecture and design. A lot of people haven't worked with a designer before and don't know what it entails. They look to the designer but are afraid to step away from the norm, preferring to use design elements they have seen in friends' homes or in magazines.

"But being a designer herself, the owner understands the principles of visual organization and the use of different design elements; textures, colours etc. and how they form and convey a visual messages," Vanja says. "She was not afraid of colour, patterns, textures or about combining different design styles and periods in subtle ways." And she was open to new ideas, for example using wallpaper on the dining room ceiling to create a unique focal point that looked remarkable against the subtle glow from the elegant antique chandelier.

"The owner wanted to create a unique and fun space without doing a lot of structural work on the home. She has a passion for colour and respect and appreciation of history and that was our fundamental concept and design language for the whole home," Vanja says.

The foyer's large-scale Italian porcelain tiles were painstakingly laid out and are best appreciated from the second floor. The tiles are laid in diamond







formation, with the tips of the diamonds at the front doors, living room and hallway precisely centred. If they were not centred it would not look correct, she says. "In the foyer we wanted to create a wow factor as you entered the home, and being that we were not changing the layout of the foyer, emphasis was given to the floor pattern; the scale/proportion of the tiles that were used thus attracting attention to the tile as a focal point to the otherwise asymmetrical featureless foyer," Vanja says. The sweeping staircase was painted black and white to work with the new feature floor and antique gold mirrors were added as accents for visual interest. The foyer is a striking picture.

The house, built around the early 2000s, was gutted. "Not a single part of the approximately 3,500-square-foot house was left untouched," she says, "but we tried to make areas work with minimal structural changes."

Access from the hallway to the living room was opened up, which gives a more balanced feeling to the living room and it makes the egress of the kitchen make more sense, she says. To get to the living room from the kitchen, the original plan involved either going through the dining room, or to the hallway through the foyer and then into living room. "We opened up one wall to create easy access from the kitchen to the living room for the family as well for guests when the family entertains."

The kitchen has a unique and dynamic feel. The owner was open to new ideas, and the new kitchen demonstrates a good balance between unity and variety. "As in other areas of the home, colour was used to create emphasis on desired elements and to create visual hierarchy," she says.

The kitchen cupboards were all custom designed by Barbini, based on the owner's requirements and needs. "It has a good working triangle. Sink, fridge and cook top were placed on the plan first then the other components were added.

The kitchen is a combination of black and white. All-black counters, cupboards, backsplash and hardware form the L shape of the kitchen. The black side is counterbalanced by a white island with a white countertop, and the long white display cabinet and shelves along the long wall that separates the kitchen from the family room, Vanja says.

Black and white act as a backdrop for colourful





antique light fixtures and handmade, hand-painted floor tiles imported from Spain that the client wanted to use. The texture and colour of the tiles give complex detail and visual interest to the otherwise neutral kitchen.

“Emphasis was given to the floor tile that the client loved, thus the same pattern was subtly used, and mimicked in the mesh pattern on the doors of the coffee centre and a long white narrow cabinet built to store small appliances,” she says. Open shelves above the coffee station provide extra display space for the client’s collectables.

Throughout the home, it is this neutral black and white scheme that creates an elegant, classic background for the client’s colourful pieces of art, furniture or accessories, much in the way that accessories such as jewellery complete a clothing outfit.

Many people who update their home shy away from bold colours on expensive-to-change features such as flooring, but not this owner. She was open to using bold colours, such as the red, yellow and blue patterned tiles in the kitchen, and the large scale black-and-white tiles in the foyer. Black hardwood floors are used throughout the main level, which also has black baseboards, doors and door trim.

To differentiate guest and family spaces, the second and lower levels have light wood floors. All of the bathrooms have new electrical and plumbing. On the lower level, the floors were redone and the ceilings and walls were painted.

Upstairs, as might be expected, the fashion designer wanted a large closet. One of the home’s original five bedrooms was turned into a walk-in closet and space

from part of its ensuite bathroom (every bedroom has an ensuite bathroom) was converted into a laundry room for easy access for the family. “The changes make the space more suitable to her needs,” Vanja says.

The master ensuite bathroom features tiles imported from Europe in a variety of sizes and tones to create elusive visual interest. In the bathroom, variety is achieved with the use of visual weight and emphasis on the dark grey feature wall, she says. The feature wall tile imported from Portugal creates a focal point within the bathroom and compliments the grey tones of the marble floors, she says. “The owner didn’t want the toilet room to be closed off.” It’s a separate entity with glass walls, as is the shower.

The same mini tiles were used on the steam shower’s floor and ceiling. Vanja says the repetition of the tile creates a unified feeling that the client wanted to achieve. Light fixtures made from different metals add sparkle and a handmade antique wardrobe adds interest and reflects the client’s own taste. Open shelving behind the toilet provides display space for the owner’s special collections.

The project took approximately six months to complete. Vanja says she enjoyed working with the homeowner. Fashion designer and interior designer understood each other from the get-go and created an elegant and inspirational space the owner will enjoy for years.



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