



26 BARBINI Collection





# MAIN FLOOR RENO MAGIC

“Our friends asked if we are in the witness protection program because we move so much,” laughs homeowner Mary Lee Keefe.

She says she and her husband, Guy Manuel, roll with life's stages, buying and selling homes to meet their family's needs. They most recently sold their cottage because their grown children no longer had the time to spend there. So it was important to them that this house have a cottage-in-the-city backyard with a pool.

The couple bought this 3,500-square-foot house in 2014, choosing a location close to their old west Toronto neighbourhood. “We didn't want to move to the suburbs but wanted a bigger lot,” Mary Lee says.

They concentrated their efforts on renovating the approximately 1,600-square-foot main floor. Rather than gut the space, which had been renovated over the years, she says they chose to refine it. Glass half walls were removed to open up the space and create an easy-for-entertaining flow.

Ceramic tile inserts in the hardwood floors in the 18x15-foot foyer and kitchen were removed, matching wood was installed in the two areas and the floors throughout were sanded and stained a darker brown.

Eighteen-inch crown mouldings were added around coffered ceilings in the living and dining rooms for drama. Pot lights were added in the living room.

Mouldings were attached to existing basic flat doors in the foyer (powder room, closet and door leading to the garage) because they were “not the least bit interesting,” Mary Lee says. Instead of putting mouldings the usual five or six inches in from the edges of the doors, they were placed two





inches in. This trick gives the doors a feeling of grandness, says Amedeo Barbini of Barbini Design Build.

Walls around the stairs to the lower level were removed and replaced with glass railings.

The dysfunctional kitchen needed the most work. Half the kitchen has a two-storey ceiling and half is regular height. An extra row of upper cabinets (with lights inside and frosted glass doors) were added on one wall where the ceiling is two storeys high. That wall of cabinetry includes an integrated fridge and double ovens.

A row of lower cabinetry with windows above runs along another wall. The lack of upper cabinetry on this side creates an open, airy feeling.

A “beverage centre” is tucked into found space under the landing for the stairs leading to the second floor.

Six-inch-deep upper cabinetry with frosted glass doors offers a place to store glasses, while a counter below provides just enough space to pour drinks. A bar fridge and wine cooler are tucked under the counter.

Identical looking cupboard doors flank the beverage centre. Although it looks like its two-door







counterpart, the door on the right is actually one piece and opens to reveal an eight-foot-deep walk-in pantry. The wasted space under the stairway landing was put to good, and surprising, use. Barbini makes creative use of every inch of space.

(The design of these spaces caters to the needs of the client and offers solutions, Amedeo says. They are spaces that would otherwise go unused, for example, under a staircase. In an upcoming project, he says plans are to build a wine cellar/storage space tucked under the stairs. In another house, under-stairs storage provides a place for a gym bag and a central vacuum hose.)

Rather than stack a second row of upper cabinets above the cabinets on the beverage centre wall, the space was left open so anyone descending the staircase behind it can see into the kitchen.

Marble was carried from countertop to backsplash around the room to create a feeling of intimacy.

A must-have for the owners is the large island/breakfast bar. Instead of the usual rectangle, the island is a trapezoid, wider on the side closest to the fridge. Barbini added a canopy with lights that mimics the shape of the island and suspended it from the ceiling with piano wire.

As a finishing touch to tie the space together, narrow bands of wood are carried horizontally around the room.

When it comes time to sell, the kitchen will provide the 'wow factor', says Mary Lee, a real estate agent. "I know what people want."

However she says they bought the house for their own enjoyment, not as a resale project.

One of the many features she liked about the home is how bright it is. "It's difficult to find an older home that's bright. It has skylights and is south facing," Mary Lee says. "When I'm sitting at the island, sometimes I almost need sunglasses."

Built-in cupboards in the adjacent eating area were removed and the owners opted for a smaller table even though there's space for a larger one. The dining room has enough room to add two big leaves to the table to accommodate their big family or guests at frequent dinner parties.

The couple lived on the second floor for the approximately six-month interior renovation. The exterior was phase 2.

Three double door walkouts at the back of the house lead to the deck. The living room and kitchen











share a deck and the family room has its own staircase down to the patio.

The private deck provides enough space for a large sectional and a built-in barbecue that was finished with the same wood as the deck. The work areas to either side of the barbecue are finished with honed stone.

The deck, which Mary Lee says looks like hardwood floors and is soft underfoot, is made of thermo-treated ash. It is fastened from underneath, a time-consuming project with an incredible result. Rather than staining, it just has to be oiled. Glass railings were added around the deck for safety without detracting from the view from the seating area to the pool.

The interior finish of the pool was originally white, which made the water look turquoise. The refinished pool has darker blue cement that makes the water look

royal blue, a more natural look, she says.

New stone work was installed and a horizontal slate cedar fence was built for privacy. "The fence is low key and disappears into the background," Mary Lee says.

Inside and out, the project was a success, because, she says, they picked the right contractor.

"Amedeo constantly reviewed the project. He provided paperwork that said what they did, the cost, the variance and why." Even better, this project came in on budget.

Barbini credits the relationship he has with his clients as key to the success of any project. "They were wonderful to work with."



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