



Unusual design
demands for a
crumbling house
presented fresh
challenges

Making Le



monade



BY Connie Adair PHOTOS BY Patricia Ilisiu

Patricia Ilisiu bought a house and planned to build an addition, but it wasn't meant to be. The house was a "huge lemon with the foundation coming apart," she says. Instead of giving up, she turned that lemon into a long cool glass of lemonade.

The project, in Toronto's East End Beaches neighbourhood, became a complete new-build packed with innovative ideas such as a hidden kitchen, and beauty and

Renovation

functionality melded together to create a calm, harmonious yet truly wow-factor space.

"The only things we kept were three exterior walls. We underpinned the old foundation and walls and extended the house by doubling (its footprint). We also dug deeper to allow for a functional eight-foot ceiling height in the basement. There are new supporting structures for the main and second floors, and a new redesigned second floor and roof," Ilisiu says.

Double front doors open on to a foyer, where an open wood staircase, lit by a skylight, is a dramatic sculptural feature. The open-concept living/dining room has a large square window with a wide ledge for displaying art. A beautiful two-sided gas fireplace acts as a divider between the eating area and a grand and gracious space that occupies the back half of the main floor. Although a favourite space with the family, calling it a family room doesn't do the elegant space justice.

The grand living space has a gallery wall on one side. Another wall of windows and sliding glass doors open the room to a striking minimalist backyard. Black horizontal wood fencing encloses the Zen yard, which has a Japanese maple for a splash of colour. The terraces and stairs are dark grey porcelain and the landscaping has white marble chips combined with dark grey natural stone. The porcelain, graded for outdoor use, is not slippery.

The same neutral grey/white palette is carried into the house, and the porcelain tile used on the patio is also featured on the island in the grand living space, says contractor Oleg Rusakov of RC Style in Toronto. He oversaw the entire project and helped make Ilisiu's dream a reality.

The library has a bank of floor-to-ceiling cupboards with doors made of high-gloss medium-density fibreboard (MDF). A counter has wall space above for art and open shelves for displaying collectibles.

The home also includes a state-of-the-art kitchen, a necessary but unwanted room. "I don't like kitchens," Ilisiu says. She didn't want to have to look at a kitchen, so she disguised it as a library.

When it's time to cook, the push of a

An open wood staircase, lit by a skylight, is a dramatic sculptural feature.



**ABOVE**

The open-concept living/dining room has a large square window with a wide ledge for displaying art.

BELOW

Sliding doors from the living room lead out to a back patio that's protected from the rain.

Choosing a Contractor

The project started with the financials. For three weeks, Ilisiu and Rusakov made a list of every want and its associated purchase and labour costs. It's important to know what the finished project will cost before you start. "The challenge was how to create a million-dollar look with a limited budget," says designer/contractor Oleg Rusakov.

- » Be prepared to choose what you want to spend your money on. For example, the sliding doors in the grand living area serve to meld indoors and out. They were a must have.
- » It took lots of legwork, and Ilisiu was happy to comply, visiting stores around Toronto and searching the Internet for exactly the products she wanted. Before construction began, it took Ilisiu a year to design the house.
- » The key to a good project and experience is finding a good contractor, Ilisiu says. She interviewed 30 contractors, dismissing each because they insisted on telling her what to do. Then she met Rusakov. "I explain to him what I want and he does it. Oleg never tries to influence me in any way."
- » The seven-month project turned out exactly how Ilisiu imagined, and Rusakov couldn't be more pleased. "Decide what makes sense for you and what makes you happy," Ilisiu says.





button raises an exhaust fan from counter level behind the smooth cooktop on the counter beside the wall. There's no back-splash to give away its location. The exhaust fan does such a good job of removing cooking odours and moisture that the wall space behind the cook top is reserved for art.

Panels hide separate freezer and refrigerator units and a sliding door conceals a microwave and wine fridge. Cookbooks and other kitchen necessities are stored behind closed doors. Two dishwasher drawers on the island were raised to just under countertop level to

eliminate unnecessary bending for people tasked with loading or unloading them.

The island includes everything – garbage and recycling drawers, storage space for cooking oils – including the kitchen sink. Ilisiu simply lifts off a portion of the countertop to reveal a rectangular sink with a tap that magically rises to above-counter height.

“My design involves a shelf to mount the faucet and soap dispenser, and a cover made of the same material as the island top to hide the sink and faucet. To build this was labour intensive and required incredible precision,

not to mention perfect assembly and gluing,” Ilisiu says. “The cover was cut to three-eighths of an inch thickness so that it is easy to lift and remove, and strong enough that it won’t break.”

When it is movie time, a push of a button lowers a screen over the gallery wall to transform the living space into a home theatre complete with surround sound.

On the second floor, there are two bedrooms that overlook the street. They have walkouts to a shared terrace. Another must was a second-floor laundry room.



The bathroom has handy twin sinks and a large glass shower. The rainhead is made by Aquabraxx, a Canadian company. It has light therapy, an aromatherapy dispenser and has five-rain shower positions from cascade to fine mist. Ilisiu says. "We installed a wet sauna unit in the shower and the combination of hot sauna and fine cool/cold mist gives a therapeutic and relaxing effect."

A walk-through closet connects the bathroom and the spacious master suite. A wall of windows and doors will open on to the soon-to-be-completed terrace overlooking



the backyard.

The lower level has heated floors and built-ins to make use of every inch of space. Space under the stairs was turned into closets, one for wine and another for bicycles. When designing a contemporary space, storage is always an issue and built-ins are a great solution, Ilisiu says.

The 2,900-square-foot home has a design that appears simple, but was anything but, says Rusakov. **HC**

LEFT

The homeowner doesn't like the look of a kitchen, so she disguised it as a library.

ABOVE

The shower has light therapy, an aromatherapy dispenser and five options from a cascade to fine mist.