

MODERN

Designer Julie Charbonneau revives her historical home with artful touches that usher in the present day.

Text by TAMMY SUTHERLAND | Photography by VIRGINIA MACDONALD



The coffee table in the living room is a classic Aldo Tura design that's covered in goat hide. Homeowner and designer Julie Charbonneau kept the original 1920s leaded glass windows on the inside of her home, but fitted new weathertight steel windows on the outside. **Sofa, cream armchairs, drapery,** Julie Charbonneau Design; **grey armchairs** by Bright Chair Company; **left table lamp** by Gilles Caffier, **right table lamp** by Porta Romana, South Hill Home.

Renaissance





DESIGNER JULIE CHARBONNEAU'S

professional mantra sets a lofty goal: make living an art. After a tour of her Toronto home, it's clearly a personal aim, too. The historical gem is decorated with a spare, serene touch — a perfect canvas for her collection of scene-stealing contemporary artwork.

In 2010, when Julie decided to move from Montreal to Toronto to expand her growing interior design business, she had two big wishes that guided her property search: she didn't want to overlook her neighbours (which ruled out many downtown neighbourhoods), and she wanted to live in an old house with character.

After seeing just eight houses, Julie found The One. The seven-bedroom, seven-bathroom heritage home in the city's north end was filled with traditional touches and had only been cosmetically upgraded by its previous owners. "It's not often that you find such beautiful old architecture,"





Julie and her daughter, Alexia, in the family room. The striking contemporary artwork is by Bogdan Molea.
Armchairs, Julie Charbonneau Design.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: Julie bought the antique writing desk — her first significant antique purchase — 15 years ago from a dealer in Montreal. Treasured pieces have followed the designer from home to home. “My first love is antiques,” she says. “They’re part of my past and will be with me forever.” **Desk chair** by Muse Design, South Hill Home; **wall colour**, Silver Satin (OC-26), Benjamin Moore.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: In the entry hall, the original woodwork was stained black. The statement light fixture is by celebrated New York designer Lindsey Adelman, and Julie found the table in Paris in the late '90s. **Rug**, Elte; **light fixture**, Hollace Cluny; **artwork** by Robert Longo.



she says. “I knew it was a special house.” It also reminded her of her last property in Westmount, the Montreal area she’d once lived in, and she was taken with the ravine lot and leafy neighbourhood.

As much as Julie loved the picture-perfect Tudor façade, she didn’t let it dictate her design plan for the interiors. She was determined to update the house for modern living — without destroying its historical charm — so she kept the original fireplaces, wood panelling, trimwork, leaded glass windows, main-level flooring and the majestic staircase. She did take some liberties with the floor plan, though. “Older homes, with their small kitchens, spooky servant staircases and tiny bedrooms with no closets, were built for totally different lifestyles,” she says. To bring the house into the 21st century, Julie opened up the wall between the kitchen and dining room. At first, she was tempted to relocate the kitchen, which was situated at the front of the house. “My instinct was to move it to the back, which is the standard today,” she says. “But I realized that the party rooms — the living and dining rooms and the main reception hall — are at the back of the house, which allows you to build events around the backyard.” Now she takes advantage of the layout for casual family birthdays and pool parties. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 115*

In the dining room, Julie placed upholstered, high-backed benches on either side of the fireplace for dramatic impact and to maximize seating. Crown moulding and walls painted in Benjamin Moore’s Silver Fox bring a stately elegance to the space. **Table, chairs, benches,** Julie Charbonneau Design; **chandelier,** Dronghia; **rug,** Elte; **artwork** by Robert Rauschenberg.



The sleek kitchen contrasts white walls and a sculptural vent hood with streamlined, ebony-coloured cabinetry. Instead of the usual uppers, Julie prefers installing custom floor-to-ceiling pantries. "I don't believe in stocking too many things," she says. "I like to have just the right amount of dishware and glasses." **Cabinetry, island, vent hood, Julie Charbonneau Design; black light fixtures, Flos.**



TOP LEFT: The kitchen table is surrounded by comfortable seating so guests can lounge while Julie cooks. A transparent pendant light ensures the statement-making artwork is the centre of attention. **Chairs, table, Julie Charbonneau Design; pendant by Lindsey Adelman, Hollace Cluny; artwork by Chuck Close, Galerie de Bellefeuille.**

CENTRE LEFT: Custom-designed pantries with sliding shelves store a collection of dishware.

BOTTOM LEFT: Julie's minimalist approach to decorating even extends to her kitchen countertop. "I like simplicity and cleanliness," she says. "With a big vase of flowers, my kitchen comes to life." **Range, Lacanche; countertops, Stonix.**



The dramatic, dark-stained woodwork continues into the family room. "I didn't want the house to be old and stuffy," says Julie. "I wanted it to be young and hip but with vintage character." **Rug**, Elte; **sofa**, Julie Charbonneau Design; **coffee table** by Fiam Italia, Avant-Scène.



ABOVE: Julie with their two standard poodles, Elle and Louis. **LEFT:** A Rue Picot light fixture in the sunroom looks like it's made of twigs, mirroring the wooded area outside the windows. **Armchairs**, Julie Charbonneau Design; **rug**, Elte; **lamp** by Porta Romana, South Hill Home.





Julie's vintage ribbon chair is upholstered in a bouclé fabric. Although it reads as a piece of fine sculpture, it's actually very comfortable, she says. **Chair** by Pierre Paulin, 1stdibs.

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In the principal bedroom, a custom, pony hide-covered headboard reaches the ceiling and features built-in side tables with plenty of storage. **Bed, headboard,** Julie Charbonneau Design; **rug, linens,** Elite; **table lamps** by CTO Lighting, Avenue Road.



TOP LEFT: The dressing room off the principal bedroom is anchored by a central island and features a lush, blush sofa and coordinating floor-to-ceiling drapery. Surprisingly, the room has become an unexpected gathering place. “Guests often want to hang out in here and drink champagne,” says Julie with a laugh. **Sofa, drapery, wardrobe, island, Julie Charbonneau Design; rug, Elte.**

BOTTOM LEFT: In a sunny corner of the bedroom, a generous armchair is an inviting spot for reading. **Chair, drapery, Julie Charbonneau Design; throw, throw pillows, South Hill Home; side table by Sebastian Herkner, Avenue Road; table lamp by Donghia; dresser by Julie Charbonneau Design for Neff.**



On the second floor, Julie created a large dressing room off the principal bedroom and on the third floor, she raised the eight-foot-high ceilings to nine and a half feet and turned several small rooms into two spacious bedrooms, each with their own ensuite bathroom.

Because Julie is passionate about contemporary art and photography, she made sure the home’s finishes were subdued, sleek and calming. “I wanted a blank canvas for beautiful furniture and artwork,” she says. Only touches of blush, blue and camel brighten the black, white and grey scheme.

Her favourite place to hang out in is the intimate family room. With dramatic dark walls, the space has a cocoon-like effect. “It’s cosy, comfortable, and there’s something interesting to look at on every wall,” she says.

Just off that space is a light-filled sunroom where Julie enjoys her morning coffee. With its views of the ravine, the nook puts her in close proximity to the “neighbours” that, as it turns out, she’s happy to overlook: a canopy of mature trees and rabbits and squirrels galore. **H&H**