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Chestnut Grove was featured in RENO&DECOR Magazine
October/November 2015 Issue.

COVER STORY

BY RACHEL SA & BRUCE KIRKLAND • PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILLIAN JACKSON

the LONG WAY HOME

An homage to Art Deco that respects
the roots of this couple's 1920s home



“We laid out a classic black-and-white tuxedo colour scheme through the tile work,” says Franco.



Our ensuite bathroom renovation took us from disaster to delight. The disaster? An incompetent contractor bungled the job so badly on the first try that the entire room had to be demolished.

The delight? Our saviours at Chestnut Grove Cabinetry and Design stepped in to steer our project back on track, re-building the room to give us the vintage-inspired ensuite of our dreams. It is now a bathroom that stays true to the roots of our 92-year-old house.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Chestnut Grove’s master designer, and company president, Franco Giampietro, remembers the challenge his team faced:

“It was a tiling disaster by the previous contractor. The wall tiles were not straight, the wrong adhesives were used, the floor was not level, glossy tiles were mixed with matte finish tiles in the shower, there were no corner moldings anywhere, the window well just looked awful and there were major plumbing leaks that were already affecting the Chestnut Grove kitchen on the floor below. The ‘dismay list’ did not end there,” says Franco.

“So, at the end of the day, it all had to be torn out back to the bare stud walls. I assigned Joe Buompastore, a Chestnut Grove project manager, to work with me on getting the job done right and we created the classic Art Deco-style bathroom that Rachel and Bruce were so eagerly waiting for.”

THE BEGINNING

My husband Bruce and I were recently married. Rather than sell Bruce’s longtime home in Toronto’s Upper Beaches neighbourhood, we took a deep breath and decided to renovate.

The house is perfectly situated, backing onto the Cassels Avenue Playground, a leafy community park and neighbourhood hub. It is a short stroll to Queen Street East and the bustling Beaches and the emerging Kingston Road Village neighbourhood is also within walking distance. But, at a compact 24x24 feet, the original building gave us little elbow room for modern living. We decided to build a 14-foot extension on all three floors—extending the basement, main, and second levels.

In its original configuration, the house had only a single, narrow washroom. Our design plans called for an additional ensuite off the newly-expanded master bedroom.

TOP LEFT: Hydrangeas sit atop the tiled window well that looks onto a leafy neighbourhood park.

TOP RIGHT: The custom-tiled shower enclosure features flat, matte white subway tiles.

COVER STORY

MURPHY’S LAW

Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. That massive plumbing leak caused extensive damage to the custom-made kitchen below. The ensuite itself looked dreadful. It was the nightmare renovation that everyone dreads—and we were smack dab in the middle of it.

That’s when our saviours appeared. Chestnut Grove Cabinetry and Design had already worked with us to design and build our dream kitchen. Their team was ready to expand the scope of its work. Bruce and I took a deep breath, re-organized our finances, and hit RESET. This is a critical lesson in the home renovation game: Better to get it right in the end, regardless of extra cost, than to live indefinitely with someone else’s large-scale mistakes.

HISTORICAL INTEGRITY

Honouring the history of the house, which was built in 1923, became the guiding design theme behind the entire project. We wanted our bathroom to echo the black-and-white Art Deco style of the original, single bathroom in the house.

The original bathroom had already been modernized (and badly) before Bruce bought the house in the late 1980s. But remnants of the original black-and-white mosaic floor and wall tiles could still be found beneath the floorboards. These tiles were a clue about how to design the new ensuite.

But first, the basic blunders of our first contractor needed correction. The Chestnut Grove team properly levelled the floor with a drypack application. An experienced tile setter then re-laid the floor, wall and shower tile using a laser level, a keen eye and a skilled hand.

“We laid out a classic black-and-white tuxedo colour scheme through the tile work,” says Franco.

Bevelled black-and-white subway tiles now give texture to the walls, while flat matte white tiles line the shower stall.

“The subway wall tiles and black border banding also call up the old-school look. When accompanied by white porcelain bathroom fixtures with classic lines, the design brings the vintage charm into place,” Franco says.

FITTINGS & FIXTURES

Chestnut Grove also advised us to get rid of the plastic shower pan from the first build. This allowed them to expand the shower enclosure and add the luxurious touch of black-and-grey floor tiles. The shower enclosure is made even more stylish with its Caesarstone seat and two built-in shelves in the back wall, both lined with Caesarstone trim and backed with the same tiles used on the shower floor. It all adds up to functionality and esthetic appeal.

We looked to TAPS Bath for our classic fixtures from Kohler’s Memoirs line. These include his-and-hers pedestal sinks with vintage-inspired Rubinet faucets. Ikea came in handy with its vintage-style medicine cabinets in white metal with swiveling mirrors.

The standout of the ensuite is the custom-made Chestnut Grove cabinet built into the wall next to the shower stall. All in white, the cabinet design features subtle 1920s-style details. Three drawers sit below cabinet doors, behind which are four shelves. The unit provides ample storage for beauty products, bath necessities and extra towels.



The retro design of the Rubinet sink faucets work perfectly with the Kohler pedestal sinks.



The shower features Kohler fixtures.



The seashell-shaped hardware on Chestnut Grove’s custom cabinet enhances the Art Deco feel.

BIRD’S EYE VIEW

One more unique design element is the picture window that puts a frame of bevelled tiles around the view of the treetops behind the house. The space also provides our chubby calico cat, Kestrel, with an ideal perch.

“My philosophy in design is focused on the clients,” says Franco. “I help them explore and express themselves.”

By working with a skilled design team geared to help us achieve our goal—and correct the stumbles at the start of our project—Bruce and I finally got the ensuite bathroom of our dreams.◆

SOURCES DESIGN AND BUILD: Chestnut Grove Cabinetry and Design, chestnutgrove.ca
DEMOLITION: Paul Home Renovations, 416.230.0113 **WALL AND SHOWER TILES:** olympiatile.com
FLOOR TILE: homedepot.ca **KOHLER BATHROOM FIXTURES:** tapsbath.com **MEDICINE CABINETS:** ikea.ca **LIGHT FIXTURES:** restorationhardware.com **PAINTING:** Phillip George Painting, 416.820.9023 **TOWELS:** homesense.ca, thebay.com **TOWEL BASKET AND VANITY TRAY:** crateandbarrel.ca



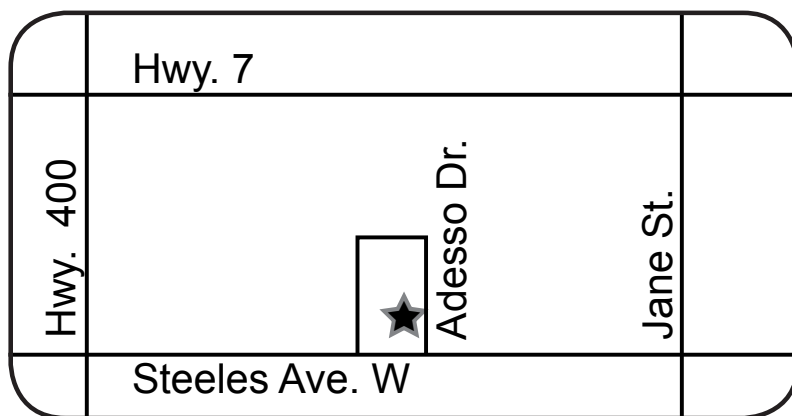
A grass-green cabinet and Buddha between the two pedestal sinks add a lively punch to the black-and-white ensuite.

“When accompanied by white porcelain bathroom fixtures with classic lines, the design brings a vintage charm into place,” says Franco



Homeowners Rachel Sa and Bruce Kirkland are award-winning writers and journalists who think they must have been a little crazy to undertake a whole-home renovation in Toronto's Upper Beaches. Read about their journey towards a dream kitchen next year in the April/May issue.

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