

FROM DOWN-AT-HEEL TO DOWNRIGHT GORGEOUS

A former century-old rental property in Newmarket is given a new lease on life with a complete makeover

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STYLING: BARBARA MILNER

BARBARA MILNER KNEW SHE HAD stumbled upon something special as soon as she stepped into the century-old, three-bedroom home in downtown Newmarket. Despite being in what she calls “a state of disarray” from a trail of rental tenants, the house had terrific bones and an endearing town-and-country feel. No doubt it was ripe for a full-blown renovation, but the designer couldn’t imagine doing anything that would intrude on the home’s warmth, character and charm. →





"It had been sitting for some time after experiencing quite a bit of wear and tear," explains Milner, principal at Toronto-based South Hill Interiors and a real estate agent with Forest Hill Yorkville. "But the decision was made that it's in a fabulous area so let's invest in a full-gut renovation. It was stripped down to the bare beams – all new layout, new framing. So what you get is a brand new home with the original bones. It's quite lovely that way. You have all the modern luxuries and finishes and aesthetics but also feel very much that you're in a historic century home."

A visual person by nature, Milner could clearly envision the home's occupants and how they'd move through the space. At under 2,000 square feet and with a picturesque backyard, it would be the perfect starter home for a young professional couple, perhaps with a small child. The 400-square-foot kitchen would be their preferred hangout, whether for eating, chatting, doing homework or entertaining. But being fairly small, the kitchen needed as much bang for the buck as Milner could give it while retaining what she calls the "modern farmhouse" fuss-free flavour. →

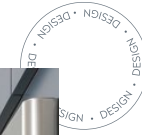
Dating back to 1886, this small, centre-plan house needed a complete overhaul to make it attractive to buyers. But designer Barbara Milner still wanted to cling to its old-fashioned ambience. She accomplished this through the use of intriguing colours and textures, as well as reasonably priced furnishings and fixtures – such as the hanging glass-and-jute-rope lighting that appears hand-blown and pricey but was sourced at HomeSense. Says Milner: "You have to know what days to go!" Faucet: American Standard; pillows, chairs, stools and lighting: HomeSense; flooring: Quality Sterling Group.



The simplicity of the cabinetry and door handles creates clean lines, while the choice of Farrow & Ball's timeless Hague Blue hue adds drama. "I wanted to get away from that builder-box look," says Milner. Cabinetry: Niico Millwork Group.



The backsplash's blue, brown and beige porcelain tile (Carpet Vestige by Aparici from SS Tile & Stone) adds understated pizzazz. "The colours are very organic and drawn from nature," says Milner. "The patina is what I really like. It looks like it's done over time. It's a very interesting, striking and soft look and not overpowering. You won't tire of it. It sits quietly."



With such adjectives as "airy," "inviting" and "functional" swimming in her head, Milner got busy. First up: maximize seating options while infusing a swoosh of style. Rather than outfitting the eating area with an ordinary table with chairs around it, the kitchen's cozy breakfast nook with its comfy wood bench seating is tucked along the window wall and anchored with a glass table that's supported by custom-built pillars. Barn-like wood-and-iron chairs can be pulled up alongside the table, with matching stools tucked under the stone island.

Though the \$20,000 kitchen possesses all the modern conveniences of today (and at affordable prices, too!), the yesteryear aspects are what make it stand out. From the blue cabinets and the white oak floor, which seems hand-scraped, to the backsplash of subway tiles, the intriguing patina on the feature wall and the rustic lighting fixtures, a sense of calmness prevails throughout the carefully planned space.

Much to Milner's delight, the kitchen now has the pitter-patter of little feet. New parents bought the home and love the flow of the room where they spend so many of their waking hours.

"I'm so pleased that a tiny human is in there and able to grow up there and have it be their kitchen, their home, where they'll formulate a lot of memories," says Milner. "That's super special! To me it's very much a practical family kitchen with a lot of heart. It photographs well, too, so their family photos will look great. Their Instagram will be marvellous!" 📸

A \$200 custom-cut glass tabletop with custom-made concrete supports keeps the breakfast nook airy and open and complements the glass-fronted cabinets above the seafoam-blue velvet bench cushion. Peacock-adorned curtains: The Sewing Shop in Caledon, Ont.