



ROBERT LEDINGHAM MEMORIAL AWARD

Confident Restraint

Designer Stephanie Brown strikes the perfect balance between timeless and contemporary.

BY JULIA DILWORTH // PORTRAIT BY CARLO RICCI

» Stephanie Brown was a Prairie kid living in a rural Alberta—"We didn't even have one stoplight, just four-way stops everywhere," she says—when her family started building a new home on an acreage. Like most small towns, Vauxhall (population 1,200) wasn't flush with architects and building professionals, so Brown's parents sourced rudimentary (and pre-internet) books of house plans in 2D sketches, with layouts covered in measurements and mysterious scribbles. Those books should have been dense, dull and incomprehensible to 12-year-old Stephanie, but she was utterly captivated.

"I could pick them apart, critique things, imagine what the layouts would look like," recalls Brown. "Suddenly, I was really paying attention to floor plans of other people's houses and imagining renovating my friends' homes and my family's, thinking about what I would do to make them better. It became an obsession."

After design school, then more than a decade of honing her skills at Calgary firm McIntyre Bills, then moving to Vancouver to start her own,

Stephanie Brown Inc., in 2012—which was "scary as hell," she says—Brown still feels that pull to reimagine people's homes for the better. "Home isn't just a roof over your head, but also a space that, of any place you go during the day, should really mean the most to you," says Brown. "It's exciting finding all the different ways that you can still make it special. And elevating it to be something beyond your average house."

Traditional, modern, minimalist, *pied-à-terre*—the designer, and winner of *Western Living's* 2017 Robert Ledingham Memorial Award for an emerging interior designer, has successfully created a wide scope of design styles thanks to her ability to speak to the heart of what homeowners are looking for. It's this understanding of design principles and thoughtful, restrained execution that made Brown stand out to our judging panel. "I am impressed with her attention to classic detailing," says DOTY judge and designer Douglas Cridland, "and her ability to spin it into a hip, contemporary feel." And it's from this place of expertise that she can so deftly bend the rules.

Canmore home: Phil Crozier

Mountain Modern
Designer Stephanie Brown (left) brings a sophisticated take to a retreat in Canmore, Alberta (centre and right). Accents of black and bronze, and wide-plank flooring against a soothing grey-and-taupe palette create a "fresh rustic" look that reads stylish, elegant and calming all at once.

Check out videos of our winners at westernliving.ca



“I literally started out of my dining room. Somewhere deep down, I had always hoped to have my own design firm.”

Traditional that doesn’t look dated, modern minimalism that’s warm enough for a young family, or, as is the case with her project in Canmore, Alberta, a vacation home that couldn’t be further from “rustic mountain lodge” (nary a log wall, mounted stag or bear pelt in sight). The now-renovated home started from a place of pine flooring, slate tile and red feature walls. “We knew that’s exactly what the homeowner didn’t want,” says Brown. It took a bit of finessing to get the contractors on board. “They were like, ‘What do you mean you don’t want wood beams and you want the doors to be grey?’ It was really a new concept to them that an interior can still read and feel rustic but be elegant at the same time,” explains Brown. “We could achieve the mountain context in more subtle ways.”

With ongoing projects in B.C., Alberta and Nova Scotia (and vacation homes in Maui), Brown is thrilled at how far her firm has come. “I literally started out of my dining room,” she says, noting that she took the big leap while in the midst of her own home renovation. “Somewhere deep down, I had always hoped to have my own design firm. I think that’s where I found this determination,” she says. “We’ve launched our new website after five years, the little bits of press we have, and now this award—I just feel like we have this energy and momentum happening right now. Of course, this is when I’ve just had a baby, too,” she laughs. “But I kind of thrive on chaos.”

Smart Study

For this Calgary home, “I had to find careful ways to mix European influences with Upper East Side New York,” she explains, “plus a touch of their Indian heritage and some mid-century-modern design.”

DOTY ALUM
INTERIORS 2010

Alda Pereira
Alda Pereira Design, Vancouver

How do you think Western Canadian design has changed over the last 10 years? I think there is still a morphing of a West Coast style—we are seeing the influence of Nordic and Japanese design locally, but we have many furniture/lighting artisan studios that are developing a strong and influential style. **What’s inspiring you now?** I am and have always been inspired by natural beauty and natural materials. I am surrounded by that here on the West Coast and continue to explore natural materials in new and different ways.