

Renovation Special

ELEGANT FRENCH LOFT

Full House

HERE'S THE STORY, OF A LOVELY RENO, FOR A FAMILY WITH SIX VERY LOVELY KIDS.

by MATT O'GRADY
photographs by PHIL CROZIER

ALL TOGETHER NOW
An open concept layout is key for bringing a busy family together: during dinner prep, the kids can be working on homework at the breakfast bar or playing games by the fire before everyone gathers around the dining table.

F

inding a house that can comfortably, and happily, fit a blended family of two adults and six kids—five of them teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17—is no small feat. Why, just ask Mike Brady—that fictional early-1970s architect who managed to shoehorn a same-sized brood into a compact 2,500-square-foot, two-storey in suburban Los Angeles (plus the live-in housekeeper, lest we forget Alice). He built the house for his late wife and three boys and then—boom—Carol and “three very lovely girls” showed up. A tight squeeze for the Brady Bunch.

For the real-life Mike and Kate, who've been together as a couple for almost six years and under the same roof for three, the challenge was similar (if,





For the couple, it was important that everybody had a space to call their own. Part of that was achieved in a very democratic way—involving each of the kids in the design of their new bedrooms—but also by creating “refuge zones,” such as the sitting room in the loft, where their younger daughter could read.



perhaps, less cornball comedic). The two professionals, both in their mid-40s, were living in the inner-city Calgary community of Parkhill, in the home where Kate had raised her kids for 15 years.

They loved the neighbourhood but were bursting at the seams—until a home came up for sale just two blocks over, that is. While the new house now measures 5,000 square feet (2,000 of that in the expansive basement, where three of the kids’ bedrooms and the rec room are), it took some creative re-engineering of the space to make it work for the family. And that’s where designer Stephanie Brown came in.

The couple had some pretty set ideas on what they wanted to do, says Brown: eliminate one of the staircases to the basement; move another staircase against the wall to create more floor space; and add an office, art studio and sitting room to the second-storey loft, while also moving the master bedroom there from the main floor. “Now we’re

really talking renovation,” Brown recalls thinking. “This isn’t lipstick and rouge!”

For the couple, it was important that everybody had a space to call their own. Part of that was achieved in a very democratic way—involving each of the kids in the design of their new bedrooms—but also by creating “refuge zones,” such as the sitting room in the loft, where their younger daughter could read while her 17-year-old brother cranked his music downstairs.

Creating that quiet loft space, however, presented a unique design challenge in the house. “I just couldn’t imagine walling off the staircase and having a door at the top,” says Brown. “We’d lose so much light, volume and openness.”

Taking inspiration from her clients, who had provided Brown with images of European-style iron windows with narrow mullions, she came up with the concept for a glassed-in atrium with a sliding panel. “We weren’t going

PERSONAL SPACE

The second-storey loft was reimagined as a multi-purpose atrium: iron-framed glass walls with a sliding panel create a sound barrier from the rest of the house—ideal for reading quietly while music blares downstairs—but still allow plenty of natural light to filter through to the first floor. Oiled European oak flooring and a coat of crisp white paint accentuate the Euro-chic look, while cozy, oversized sofas invite relaxation.



Renovation Special // ELEGANT FRENCH LOFT

"In the kitchen, we tried to separate work zones," says Brown, "because Kate and some of her daughters like to bake. They wanted to have everything consolidated so that they could bake without taking over the entire kitchen. And with the amount of beverages they go through, we also put in a dishwasher drawer just for glasses."



BRIGHT & WHITE

A classic white kitchen—installed in place of the former living room to take advantage of the beautiful skylights—gets a hit of French charm with the addition of a vintage-inspired chandelier and custom wrought iron detailing on the wood-topped island. Custom cabinetry provides plenty of storage space.

to implement iron windows or doors elsewhere for practical and budgetary reasons—but I thought, here's an opportunity to use that aesthetic, and create the sound barrier that you're looking for."

While the atrium was a one-off feature, echoes of it resonate throughout the house, from the charcoal paint on the inside of the windows and doors to the iron railings on the main staircase—and, most notably, in the stunning acid-wash steel backdrop for the fireplace in the living room. That fireplace surround is another standout feature of the house: the mantel is a singular piece that Brown picked up on sale from one of her suppliers, Alberta

Marble and Tile. "I knew Kate and Mike would love it if it were in the right setting—if we didn't over-traditionalize it and juxtaposed it with this super-contemporary backdrop."

As a whole, that contrast—the traditional accenting the contemporary—can be found everywhere: from the atrium to the living room fireplace, and from the dining room (with its 10-foot trestle table, featuring a concrete top and weathered-oak base, paired with Louis XVI-style chairs—enough to seat eight) to the kitchen (with leather-finish Madreperola stone countertops and an eating bar, topped with reclaimed wood, that sits beneath a stunning

BATHING BEAUTY

In the master bathroom, a free-standing Cheviot Balmoral tub acts as a front-row seat for the forest view outside (though sheer curtains add a modicum of privacy when necessary). A full-length mirror provides the backdrop for the Calacatta marble countertop, twin Ronbow sinks and a luxurious custom ottoman.



antique-brass and crystal chandelier).

"I think we called the style 'elegant French loft'—although there's no real descriptor because it's an eclectic look that evolved along with the project," says Kate with a laugh. Whatever you call it, it is a house clearly designed for living. Chief among the reno's accomplishments was creating a seamless connection between the living and dining rooms, and between dining room and kitchen. The kitchen, which had been in the centre of the main floor, was moved to where the old family room was, to expand its footprint and make use of an existing skylight. (The kitchen and dining room essentially trade places.)

"In the kitchen, we tried to separate work zones," says Brown, "because Kate and some of her daughters like to bake. They wanted to have everything consolidated so that they could bake without taking over the entire kitchen. And with the amount of beverages they go through, we also put in a secondary sink in the kitchen, with an instant hot faucet, a filtered water faucet and a little dishwasher drawer just for glasses."

Still, the question: with all those teenagers in the house, there must be the occasional tension—some crying over spilled milk? Apparently not. "Luckily, all the kids get along really well," reports Kate. Unlike that other, famously querulous bunch. *HL*