

POST HOMES

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CONDOS

DO NOT ENTER

Can a handyman
just come in, with
no ID? *PH4*

PRIMED

TO KEEP OR NOT

When it's best to
delete some square
footage. *PH4*

FOR SALE

COTTAGES

Our long-weekend
look at waterfront
listings. *PH10*



SHAI GIL

Does anyone care about the doodad that attaches a stair railing to a wall? It's not a trick question — the answer is no, unless you're the architect Cindy Rendely, who last week caressed the round wall-mounted bracket in a Deer Park residence to make a point.

"You can get lost in the minutiae, which I tend to do because I used to work at a much smaller scale," Rendely says animatedly, as she crouches over the railing in

in design, details make a difference. This is certainly the case at her Walnut House project. As its name implies, the wood is the primary material used in the three-storey, 3,500-square-foot dwelling, built by Vic Furguele of VMF Structures.

Minimalist architecture can come off as cold but that's not even close here, where a heavy use of walnut gives the space sumptuous warmth. In fact, combined with the thicket of plant life framed through

out — Caesarstone in this case," Rendely says.

"It could be any species. It just happens to be walnut here. I prefer a more minimal material palette, as I always make an attempt to reduce the visual noise throughout a project."

Walnut even finds its home on the treads of the floating stairs, inlaid with leather to heighten the richness, a nod to that fastidious jeweller's eye. Ditto silvery nooks that encase two large artworks featuring

SINGULAR SENSATION

The fervently focused architect Cindy Rendely brings her jeweller's eye to "the one wood, one stone" Walnut House *By Iris Benaroia*

silver sneakers that match her sweater and specs.

Rendely is referring to her previous career as a goldsmith, metal artist and jeweller. To give an idea of her unwavering focus, she once spent days labouring over a drop earring she was casting out of a single raisin. "That's why that thing matters to me," continues Rendely, whose firm Architexture is its 12th year of business. "What's the diameter of it? Is it too big, too small?"

Her point is, of course, that

glass off the kitchen, it feels downright cottagey.

Walnut cascades over the floors, migrating onto window frames and doors and custom built-ins — all designed by Rendely; she also did the dining table with smart C-channel legs, the nearby desk (a convenient pantry is on the flip side) and the beguiling recessed bed in the master bedroom. It's all so perfectly shipshape and serene.

Sticking to one palette helps. "I try to use one species of wood and one type of stone through-

the famous turn-of-the-century magician Carter the Great that flank a discreet fireplace.

"The homeowners wanted those pieces to be highlighted, hence the (niches)," Rendely says. "I have used the stainless steel surround details throughout my projects in many ways, including television niches, toilet paper niches and trims at fireplace openings. However, I have never used (the material) before when mounting a piece of art."

See **WOOD** on Page PH5

“ I try to use one species of wood and one type of stone throughout. It could be any species. It just happens to be walnut here. I prefer a more minimal palette, as I always make an attempt to reduce the visual noise throughout a project — *Cindy Rendely, architect*



Clockwise from top left, Cindy Rendely on the stoop of the rebuilt home, a third-floor child's room with exposed rafters, the kitchen with mirrored range hood.

ADDITION THROUGH REDUCTION

WOOD
Continued from Page PH1

Neat and inviting as it is now, the Walnut House began life more like the Woeful House. Divided into a sunlight-thwarting duplex, the home had two of everything: multiple entry vestibules, staircases, kitchens and washrooms, even addresses. Plus, as it was built in the 1940s, there was knob-and-tube wiring. “But we made the decision to buy it in 10 minutes flat,” says Kathryn From, an entrepreneur who lives here with her husband, writer/director Shawn Alex Thompson, and their children Josephine, six, and Logan, 11. “My husband has a good design eye and we didn’t want to pay for somebody else’s renovation. (Apart from the flaws), we loved that it was a detached south-facing lot on a quiet street.” The opposite, she says, of the family’s Victorian in the Annex, near the rowdy Brunswick House. From and Thompson initially meant to build from scratch, but it was too pricey. The couple enlisted Rendely — who previously had renovated From’s office while at a different architectural firm — to gut and rebuild the home instead, to create better flow, light and space. Occupying the entire second floor, the airy master suite, for instance, includes a spa washroom and a home office. Above that floor, the serious walnut playfully gives way to lulling white used extensively in the loveliest of children’s rooms, connected with a shared washroom. Whimsical Artemide ball pendants poke through the rafters like white balloons. “It really feels like you’re in a treetop,” Rendely says. “We kept this more like an attic and it’s the most interesting space because of the rafters and the quirkiness. The flooring is new but whitewashed, so it’s more rough-hewn than the rest of the house.” As for opting not to rebuild new, From says “I’m happy we went this route because we basically recycled a house. We didn’t make it a bigger footprint. We’d rather have quality of finishes, as opposed to adding 400 square feet.” That’s why getting each piece right was critical. “The kitchen is the heart of the home,” Rendely says. “I know it’s

cliché, but it’s the truth here. Shawn is a serious cook and he was very involved in how he wanted everything, truly right to the details of the pot drawers: open with no drawer fronts.” After all, wrestling with cookware is the worst when you’re in the thick of making dinner. “And it’s much nicer to face your guest when cooking in an open-concept space,” From says. “That’s why we absolutely wanted to have the range and the stovetop on the island — we had spoken to chefs who recommended designing this way.” The only problem was how to make the eight-foot-long vent hood above it “disappear,” so it didn’t impede the sightlines. When in doubt, go ’80s — clad the thing in mirror. Simple yet brilliant, doing so reflects the light, and you don’t notice how clunky it is. “Mirroring it was a way to dematerialize the mass,” Rendely says, as From offers her own interesting yet counter-intuitive interpretation: “Shawn has a line from a set decorator about the theory of the red door. If you want to get rid of the red door, paint it redder.” Overemphasis may work in such instances, but outdoors it’s a different story. Most of us have seen streets lined with traditional homes, interrupted by a structure with a more modernist aesthetic. “That’s usually the work I do,” Rendely says. “But the homeowners’ desire was 100% to respect the streetscape, to blend in with the neighbourhood.” Rather than recreate derivative Victorian elements to mimic neighbouring houses, Rendely gently stripped the ornamentation from the Walnut House, restoring the original brick. Crumbled columns were replaced by streamlined steel versions, while a glass railing is a stand-in for traditional wooden pickets. A remnant of an old bay window was covered in Corten steel, while a fussy canopy was swapped for more of the architect’s go-to material, and there’s some on the side and rear elevations as well. Peering up at the house from the driveway, Rendely says: “At a quick glance, everything looks like it was always there, and then when you inspect the details of the house more up close and personal, you start to see they’re new.” The sharpest eye could make them out.

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