



Homeowner Leah Life wanted to keep her pool in the renovation, but added a larger changing room/shower in the garage for her neighbour to use when she uses the pool for swimming lessons. PHOTOS BY NANNIE SPRINGER

## 'It's just organized chaos on a grid'

To an outside eye, some aspects of a renovated Toronto house might not make sense, but a jeweller turned architect's design is precise and logical

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They barely knew each other, but a promise is a promise.

To explain: Cindy Rendely and Harold Manker knew each other as teenagers. Many decades later, Ms. Rendely, a goldsmith and jeweller, became an architect. Mr. Manker, a condo builder, followed her new career with interest; he'd say to his wife, Leah Life, that should they ever decide to renovate, there could be only one choice.

But, Ms. Life says, she was "the shoemaker's wife" who went barefoot, architecturally speaking. Her 1954 house in the Bathurst Street and Lawrence Avenue West area was falling apart.

But in 2013, the condo-builder invited the architect over to catch up and have a look at the place. And, though they only spoke for a few hours, Ms. Life and Ms. Rendely hit it off. A few years later, however, and still without a firm plan to begin a renovation, the unthinkable happened.

"So how many weeks after he died did I call you?" Ms. Life asks Ms. Rendely with a laugh.

"Pretty soon," the architect says, reaching for her glass of wine.

The two women are gazing across the dark, still water at the massive weeping beech in Ms. Life's backyard. On this hot, steamy night, the tree's long branches look as though they'd like to stretch a little farther and take a dip. "I didn't want to leave my tree or my pool, so let's see what we can do," Ms. Life remembers thinking. So, in 2016, they got to work.

Strangely, the pair began with an "intimate conversation" about furniture. Ms. Life described a childhood memory of visiting a home in the 1970s and the very stylish Roche Bobois Mah Jong sofa that dominated the living room; accustomed to hand-me-downs, it was quite the sight, and she swore she'd own one some day. So, Ms. Rendely ordered one of the modular masterpieces. And, since it would be placed near the dining area, it would work well, too, Ms. Life says. "I needed something that I could move around, and it can [go] from two people having dinner to 30 people having dinner.

"[I'm partly-central for the fam-



The colour palette of the interior is all warm greys, creamy whites and a muted wood grain in the Bulthaup kitchen. The goal of the layout was to make sure nothing hindered the view of the lush, green backyard.

ily, so all the Jewish holidays are at my house," she says.

Space planning was next, and, again somewhat strangely, when all was said and done, the house ended up a little smaller and with fewer bedrooms. Smaller because a rear "bump-out" was deemed unnecessary; lighter on bedrooms because the building needed only to house Ms. Life and her teenage daughter (now in university).

"Usually everyone has a wish-list and it's always bigger and more and more, right?" Ms. Rendely says, a hint of frustration in

her voice. "People are always designing for the next buyer, and I say to clients, 'For the next buyer, this could be a tear-down.'"

And speaking of tear-downs, while this neighbourhood has seen many of the original dwellings fall so ham-fisted faux chateaux can replace them, both client and architect agreed that the long and "very Toronto" orange-yellow brick should stay, along with the roofline and the home's radiant floors. To Ms. Rendely's jeweller's eye, however, a few windows had to be tweaked for symmetry's sake, and the "willy-nilly" patch of angled brick near the front door had to be covered with something more finely crafted. Enter Hamilton-based metal panel manufacturer Sobotech, which Ms. Rendely had used before.

Interestingly, Ms. Rendely had been one of Sobotech's first customers to ask to apply their zero-maintenance product to a residential building; this time, she went one further and asked them to create perforations. They obliged, although they'd not done that before either. Ms. Rendely and her team "drew every circle" to figure out what looked best.

"It's just organized chaos on a grid," the architect says, flashing her big smile. After seeing how the panel beside the front door allowed daylight to enter the house and, at night, shine beacon-like, she came up with the name Velled House. While the casual passerby may not notice, eagle-eyed architecture aficionados will note that the metal panels have been powder-coated to match the window frames.

"That level of detail, of course, carries inside. Step inside the cozy foyer and everything is precise, angular, logical. The colour palette is all warm greys, creamy whites and a muted wood grain

in the Bulthaup kitchen. Shelves float and walls slide to change room configurations. And absolutely nothing hinders the view of the lush, green backyard. The eye is surprised only by the aforementioned sofa and Hans Wegner dining chairs in a matching – and very striking – cobalt blue.

One sliding wall reveals a powder room that connects to a larger change room/shower in the garage. Since Ms. Life allows a friend to use the pool to give swimming lessons – "I love the sound of screaming children in the pool – best sound in the world," she says – the garage has been designed as a separate building with access from the street and the backyard, so Ms. Life doesn't have to be home when lessons take place (sadly none this year owing to COVID-19). It also works well to segregate smokers during parties.

Upstairs, more walls that slide and more calming materials, but more noteworthy is the addition of a large lounge area with a coffee station and mini-fridge – "We could've had a bedroom here," Ms. Rendely says – and the master bathroom that steals a little natural light via a long, frameless window.

Over all, the home offers shad-owy places to cocoon and feel safe in, and others where one can be on full display, such as the living/dining area, which has no window coverings. While this satisfies the two extremes of human behaviour, it's also been great to have those choices while hibernating during the pandemic.

"People stop to look at the pine cone by Floyd Eizinga – he's a welding artist in Niagara region – and then they'll see us eating and having a bottle of wine, and then they'll look away, and then we try and [engage them]," Ms. Life says. "So it's kind of like sitting on the front porch."