

Facelift injects a timeless feel in limited space in Riverdale

Masterful use of new and old elements creates an airy ensuite out of crumbling deck

PAIGE MAGARREY
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It seems a bit like a magic act: Take a third-floor bedroom and add an ensuite bath, walk-in closet and nursery? Nonetheless, that's exactly what Toronto architecture studio Blacklab achieved in a turn-of-the-century home in Riverdale: making more from less.

"The clients wanted to create an open and airy master suite," says Joe Knight, who founded Blacklab with Andrea Kordos, Tony Round and Sarah Knight in 2012. Since then, the hands-on boutique studio has completed new builds and reno projects all over Ontario, often merging architecture and interior design with graphic art and even cinematography.

In Riverdale, Blacklab was commissioned to make the most of every inch of the 775-square-foot room. The team split the existing space into a bedroom for the clients and, overlooking the front yard, an area for their soon-to-arrive second child, sectioned off from the main room by the staircase down to the rest of the house.

They also transformed a barely used, dilapidated deck off the back of the 1906 property into a walk-in closet and full bathroom with shower, toilet, double vanity and tub.

The designers were also tasked with revitalizing the space, which they achieved by combining existing elements, such as skylights, with new windows that frame the surrounding views of the garden below and play with the building's historic charm by seamlessly matching the ceiling heights and dimensions of the extension to the existing space.

Mixing new with old can be difficult, especially when you're adding

new water lines to an already tight space.

"New mechanical systems needed to be integrated as seamlessly as possible, which can be tricky in a renovation," says Knight, who kept under budget by situating the new bathroom directly above the second-floor bath, simplifying the mechanics.

Creating an illusion of a large space also presented another challenge: taking advantage of the views and daily sun trajectory — and making the room seem as large as possible — while offering privacy from the nearby neighbours. This was achieved using thin slot windows up the side of

"We utilized the more neutral tile choices as a clean, simple backdrop, allowing the sharpness of the walnut finished millwork to pop a bit."

JOE KNIGHT
CO-FOUNDER, BLACKLAB

the addition, which allowed in ample light without putting the inhabitants on view.

The team opted for one big picture window, at the end of the bathroom, that overlooks the back garden (the long, narrow site allowed for more privacy from windows aimed toward the back).

"This opening allowed the interior to bleed into the exterior seamlessly," says Knight. "Also, the introduction of a clean and bright material palette helps natural light bounce around the interior with ease, keeping each space open and airy."

The palette has a stark gallery feel in the best possible way. Cabano faucets and shower fixtures, Caroma Liano undermount sinks, a Toto toilet and a Nepture Zen drop-in tub comprise the fixtures, while a walnut vanity and storage unit by Aya Kitchens warm up the space. Grey Falda Nat tiles on the floors and horizontal



surfaces and White Falda Nat tiles on the walls and vertical surfaces, both from Stone Tile International, keep a constant look throughout and avoid looking cluttered.

"The client wanted to create a timeless feel," says Knight. "We were mindful of using materials that wouldn't date, and so we utilized the more neutral tile choices as a clean, simple backdrop, allowing the sharpness of the walnut finished millwork to pop a bit."

Also contributing to the seamless feel are the tub and shower, which combine into one long line.

"We were keen on having the whole back wall read as one continuous element. Allowing the tub surround to wrap down into the shower facilitated this connection," says Knight, adding that it also allowed for a bench in the shower, which was requested. "Ultimately, it's always critical to consider the details as they really make the difference between a good project and a great one."



An unused, dilapidated back deck, left, was transformed into a stylish ensuite, above. The new bathroom's thin slot windows help make the space seem larger while still ensuring privacy