

ON TIME, ON BUDGET, ON MOUNT ROYAL

A 1960s bungalow on the mountain's flank is redesigned for a young family

BY BRYAN DEMCHINSKY

PHOTOGRAPHY: MONTREAL HOME

STYLING: LEAH DAGHER

Montreal is a big city with some of the attributes of a smaller place – such as networks of friends who grew up here and made careers in all sorts of fields, but keep in touch.

For businessman Philippe Boisclair, a high school friend was instrumental in helping him create the kind of living space he wanted for his family. Philippe and wife Julie Doré have had the good fortune to be able to call on Stéphanie Cardinal to design their Outremont home.

Cardinal is at the top of her game. She is the president of Humà Design, an award-winning design firm (Grands Prix du Design in 2012 and 2011) whose client list includes mega developers Canderel and Cadillac Fairview as well as Cirque du Soleil. Her young and dynamic team has brought adventure and vision to such projects as the Tatami sushi bar in Old Montreal and the Bassins du Havre condominium project.

“I worked with her on some commercial projects and I knew about her talents and skills. I knew she would see the same potential as I would,” says Philippe, referring to his home.

Phillipe was also a bit of a visionary in this regard. When he and Julie first saw the house nestled on a secluded street on Mount Royal's eastern flank, they were attracted by something that drove other buyers away: the '60s-era house had never been renovated. “We only visited one house and it required so much work. ... I could see why it was on the market for a long time. But it was solid construction. I liked the fact it was a bungalow and it had that Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie School style.”

With three children to accommodate, Philippe had the basement space redone immediately after buying the home in 2009, but he left the main floor's 2,700 square feet until recently when he contacted Cardinal.

They were on the same page from the beginning. What was needed, they agreed, was a space for a young family on the go.

“Their initial vision was to make the kitchen the central focus of the house, because of the three kids, and because they cook a lot. There had to be a space where you have breakfast or quick lunches,” Cardinal says. “And also a work space because (Julie's) preparing food while the kids do their homework.”

And so an outsized island that dominates the kitchen area was built. The sink, dishwasher, cooktop and storage space – for kitchenware and the children’s toys – are all contained in this unit.

For owners and designer, the second most important feature was the fireplace, contained in a massive stone wall that divides the dining area from the living room. This Frank Lloyd Wright-like element was part of what first attracted Philippe, and it needed to be restored. “We kept the original masonry but opened it on one side so one can circulate around it,” Cardinal says. “The other side, which hadn't been maintained, we refaced. (With the fireplace) we kept the original character of the house.”

The entrance to the house entailed another significant redo. A doorway from the garage had become the most used way in, but, says Cardinal, it meant “there was no communication between the exterior and interior of the house.” The original main entrance to the street was remade into a hallway mud room with plenty of storage space, and a powder room was added.

A second entry hall gives way to a series of elegant wooden pillars that create a transition into the dining area.

Another kept element was a Prairie-School-style wood panel, behind which is a built-in bar. Cardinal doubled the size of this feature. It is next to a wood door that leads to the other rooms, and together they function like a Modernist artwork. Indeed, they complement a painting, on wood, near the entranceway. This piece, one of several works by Montreal artist André Desjardins that grace the main floor, has the look of an old door. Another of Desjardins’ paintings, of a woman’s face, is on the dining room side of the fireplace wall. Julie, with the help of Cardinal’s assistant designer Manon d’Alençon chose the artworks and furnishings. As an ensemble they create an easygoing intimacy that brings the rooms together.

For Philippe, meanwhile, an important part of the project was the installation of a geothermal energy system. “That was a big advance in terms of comfort and energy savings. It made the house more efficient,” he says. “You're on the mountain where the rock makes it a more efficient system because it keeps the water cooler in summer and warmer in winter.”

He also gives much credit to the contractor on the project, Stéphane Chabot. “We didn’t go all out as far as costs are concerned. Stéphanie gave us a design look, but was very cost-conscious and it ended up very well. The contractor said it would take four months, and it took four months and it came in on budget. That’s something you don't see very often.”