

Reno in Leslieville creates a home to grow into

Couple's multi-coloured, 'unique' semi-detached is transformed into a modern family space

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NOW: "It's become this real central hub where everyone just kind of congregates and hangs out," says Tessa Steenstra — with husband Andy Saavedra and kids Mattias and Emme — of their new kitchen island.

Carlos Osorio / Toronto Star

By Jackie Burns Special to the Star

Tessa Steenstra and her husband Andy Saavedra prove the theory that opposites attract.

While she was raised in a six-bedroom farmhouse surrounded by acres of land in southwestern Ontario, he grew up in an apartment in London, England, that didn't even have a balcony.

Their contrasting childhoods made for interesting conversations when it came time to find a Toronto home in which to raise their own family.

Six years ago, when Steenstra was eight months pregnant with their son,

Mattias, the couple finally settled on an eclectic four-bedroom, one bathroom semi-detached home in [Leslieville](#).

Saavedra, 41, immediately dubbed it a “mansion” with a “palatial-sized garden,” while Steenstra, 39, admitted it had good bones. It was the type of house their family — which now includes 3-year-old daughter Emme — could grow into without having to build a third storey or any new additions.

But growing into the house meant a ton of work. A previous rec room addition to the back of the house needed to be redone and properly insulated.

Another previous owner built a second garage addition that he used as a workshop, so a major overhaul was needed to make use of that extra space, too.

Plus, the inside and outside of the house had been painted in various shades of purple, blue, red and orange.

“What we saw was that it was a little unique; it had so much potential,” says Steenstra.

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The couple, who work for Scotiabank, paid \$580,000 for the home in 2011. And since money was tight with two maternity leaves so close together, they decided to wait and get out of the baby phase before throwing themselves into costly renovations.



The renovated living room is open to the kitchen and dining area.

In 2015, they were selected to participate in an HGTV home renovation show called [The Expandables](#), but the City of Toronto wouldn't issue permits in time because of questions over the previous additions.

“It all fell apart two weeks before filming,” says Steenstra. “It was so heartbreaking!”

Since they had to go to the Committee of Adjustment, get the land surveyed and have all of the drawings completed, it took another year to regroup and prepare for the renovations. The work finally began this past January and was completed 3-1/2 months later.

“That kind of allowed us to figure out what we wanted the space to be, rather than rushing into a reno up front,” says Steenstra. “It gave us five years to just live in the space and dream about it and think about it. I really like the way it worked out.”

The family found a \$2,000-a-month Airbnb rental home in the neighbourhood for the duration of the renovation, which was led by 3 Stones Custom Homes.

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“Our contractors were amazing; you hear about all these projects that go on and on and on, and never end; they were right on schedule. Everything was awesome,” says Steenstra, adding they spent \$10,000 on plumbing, \$11,000 on electrical and \$21,000 on HVAC.



A quiet corner in the renovated family room that's open to the kitchen and dining area.

Carlos Osorio/Toronto Star

Designer [Lesley Brookes](#) was hired to turn their reno dreams into a reality, creating a beautiful new open-concept kitchen, dining and living space.

Half of the garage was also converted into a large mud room with second bathroom. And what was once a cold rec room is now a warm sunken TV room with heated flooring and a full wall of built-ins.

“Renovations in Toronto are very expensive these days, so we had to keep budget in mind,” says designer Brookes.

She says a lot of IKEA cabinetry was used throughout, and was made to look more customized by blending it with some custom work from their contractor and adding expensive fixtures.

The bathroom also got a more customized look, thanks to a new skylight. “When it’s daylight and the sun is coming into the bathroom, it shines on the floor on a nice pattern,” says Brookes.

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The kitchen budget came in at \$27,000, with the family splurging on their countertops so the space would have a more customized look.

“They put in a faux marble quartz countertop, which a lot people are doing these days because it doesn’t stain like a true marble would,” says Brookes, adding the veining in the countertop makes it look like marble.



A new back-entry mudroom was created using half of the home's garage.

Carlos Osorio/Toronto Star

And since Steenstra was concerned about having dirty dishes on display while entertaining in her new open-concept kitchen, Brookes came up with an idea to raise the island and hide the mess.

“One little part is raised so that when you’re in the living room and you look toward the kitchen, you don’t see what’s on the island, you just see these cabinets with the countertop,” she says. “You’re still open, but you’re not really seeing the dishes and what’s going on.”

Steenstra says having the huge island in the kitchen for her whole family to eat together is one of her favourite features of the renovation.

“I love the set up that it’s two and two; we’re not all sitting in a line,” she says. “I can be cooking and they can be sitting there and we’re all kind of chatting. It’s become this real central hub where everyone just kind of congregates and hangs out!”

Steenstra now believes their home would list for up to \$1.3 million thanks to the current market and all of the work they've done.

REGAINING THEIR PRIVACY



NOW: Tessa Steenstra, husband Andy Saavedra and kids Mattias and Emme in their new sculptural privacy structure that they won in MicroPro Sienna's Ontario Reno Challenge.

Carlos Osorio

When Tessa Steenstra and her husband Andy Saavedra moved into their Leslieville home, their backyard had a big maple tree that provided shade and privacy.

Then the tree had to come down and they found themselves feeling very exposed.

“We lost the tree and we had all these condos built, so it became a very different feel to our yard,” says Steenstra.

They tried desperately to keep things shady and private, putting up six umbrellas and even rigging sails from IKEA. “It looked like this crazy yard,” she says. “We were always trying to get shade.”

In the spring, Steenstra heard about MicroPro Sienna's Ontario Reno Challenge, which would reward the winner with more backyard privacy. To enter, contestants had to share a photo of their backyard on Instagram or Twitter.

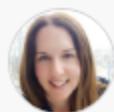
Steenstra's Instagram photo immediately caught the attention of celebrity contractor Chris Palmer, who co-designed the contest with HGTV's Home to Win landscape designer Carson Arthur. The duo decided the family's six umbrellas were just too sad to ignore and declared them the winner.

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"Their privacy was the big issue," says Palmer. "It was right along a main sidewalk on a corner lot, so there's two sidewalks around their property. People could just walk by and stare at their yard. There was no seclusion."

Palmer and his cousin managed to transform the family's uncomfortable backyard into a quiet sanctuary in just one day, erecting a sculptured privacy structure using MicroPro Sienna wood. "It's a really dramatic change!" he says.

Steenstra was overjoyed when she found out they won, especially since the indoor renovations had already eaten up their budget. "It's been awesome!" she says. "It's really become this intimate hangout spot and we love it."



Jackie Burns

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