

Warming up to Modern

BY JOHN O'CONNOR



The cottage needed to be torn down, but the neighborhood needed the cottage. Dilapidated as it was, the 1870s cottage was an essential element on Amelia Street. So I worked with it. I still had to tear down most of it, but I rebuilt the cottage with the original form and footprint in mind. The cottage became my studio and office, and I added a three-story home behind it.

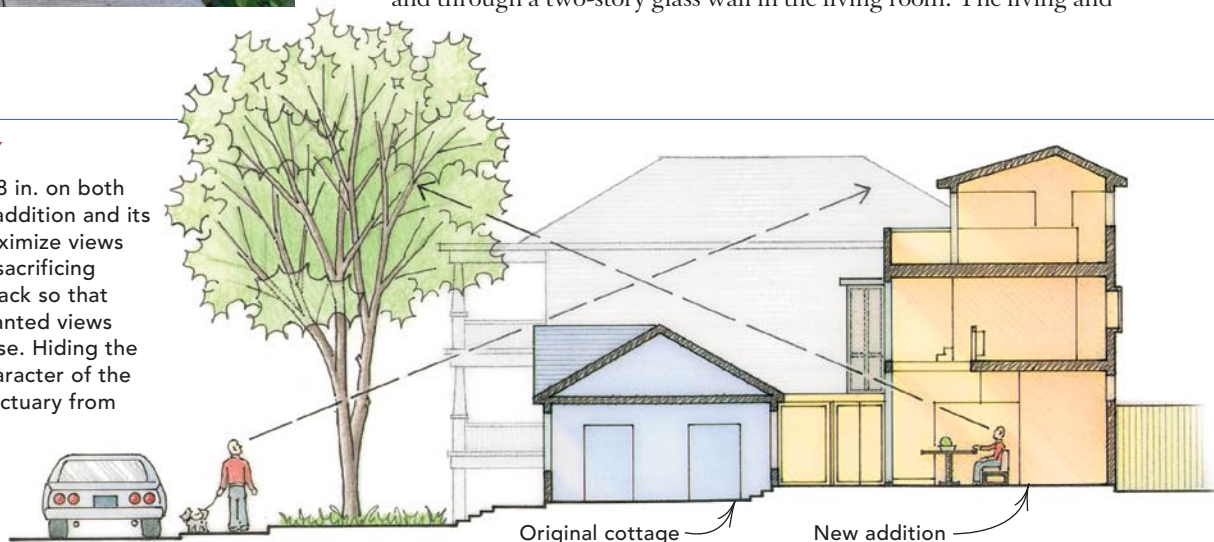
My plan presented two challenges. The first was to find ways to blend the traditional form of the cottage with the new modern house. Combining traditional patterns with modern materials was the answer. The form of the renovated cottage retains a connection to the neighborhood, and modern materials integrate it with the new house behind.

The second challenge was to create a home and an office that were separate yet congruent spaces. The cottage was reconfigured into a large studio on one side and an office and washroom on the other (floor plan, p. 76). A series of openings and sliding oak doors give consistency to all the rooms and establish a rhythm that leads to the kitchen and courtyard, the link between my office and my home. The sound of falling water from a courtyard fountain muffles outside noise and provides sound separation between home and office.

The courtyard also offers a view from my office, from the kitchen, and through a two-story glass wall in the living room. The living and

REFUGE IN THE CITY

With neighbors as close as 18 in. on both sides of the house, the new addition and its windows were located to maximize views and natural lighting without sacrificing privacy. The addition is set back so that the cottage roof blocks unwanted views both into and out of the house. Hiding the tall new home retains the character of the neighborhood and offers sanctuary from the busy city street.



Architecture

A Toronto architect updates a traditional cottage for his office and adds a modern three-story home, but you'd never know it from the street

One large window draws sunlight for two floors. Two stories of glass on a south-facing wall fill the first-floor dining and living area and the second-story bedroom with sunlight. The sliding-glass doors and large window also extend views to the courtyard and tree-tops without sacrificing privacy. Photo taken at A on floor plan.



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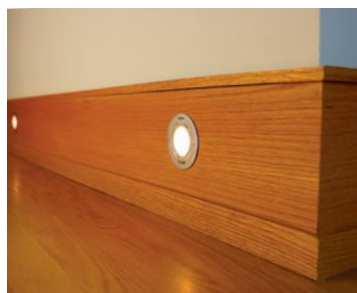
dining areas have views of the backyard patio and gardens and a waterfall staircase that doubles as a path to the garage. The garage is accessible from a private lane behind the house. The bedroom and main bathroom are out of sight on the second floor, and a third-story retreat is visible only from neighboring rooftops.

I'm an architect, so my home is my portfolio. Just enough of the residence is visible from my office to pique my clients' curiosity. They're always invited to explore.

Challenging modern stereotypes

In my professional life, I am constantly challenging the notion that modern architecture is cold and austere. It doesn't have to be either. For me, modern architecture is the freedom to reinterpret traditional forms into new compositions. Unlike traditional architecture, which relies on historical precedents, modern architecture can distill traditional influences into an abstract composition while retaining the spirit of the precedent.

Natural, tactile materials infuse warmth into my work. Throughout my home and office, I used reclaimed wood as flooring and column cladding to add warmth and history to a new space. Soft natural fabrics, rough and polished concrete, perforated metal, and natural stone bring organic, varied textures into the house. The colors were selected to work with the changing seasons. Snow high-



Low-voltage fixtures lend the sun a hand. Sunlight warms the kitchen through a long skylight, and the living areas through lots of glass doors and windows. Flush-mounted fixtures add task lighting, accent lighting, and guiding light, as in the hallway baseboards (above). Top photo taken at B on floor plan; photo right taken at C.



methods of lighting each space for different times of day and for different activities."

lights white and light colors in winter, and browns and dark colors blend with the leaves on the ground in fall. Of course, nothing warms up an interior space like light. I experimented with multiple light sources, natural and artificial, to create flexible levels of lighting for both day and night.

Multiple sources for great lighting

In most areas, I tried to use two or three methods of lighting a space for different times of day and for different activities. Other than spotlighting artwork and architectural elements to draw attention to these focal points, I tried not to have light fixtures as objects in the house.

During the day, natural light fills the living area and the bedroom through a south-facing, two-story glass wall. A skylight well brings midday sun into the kitchen. And on the third floor, sliding-glass doors and large windows fill the retreat with sunlight.

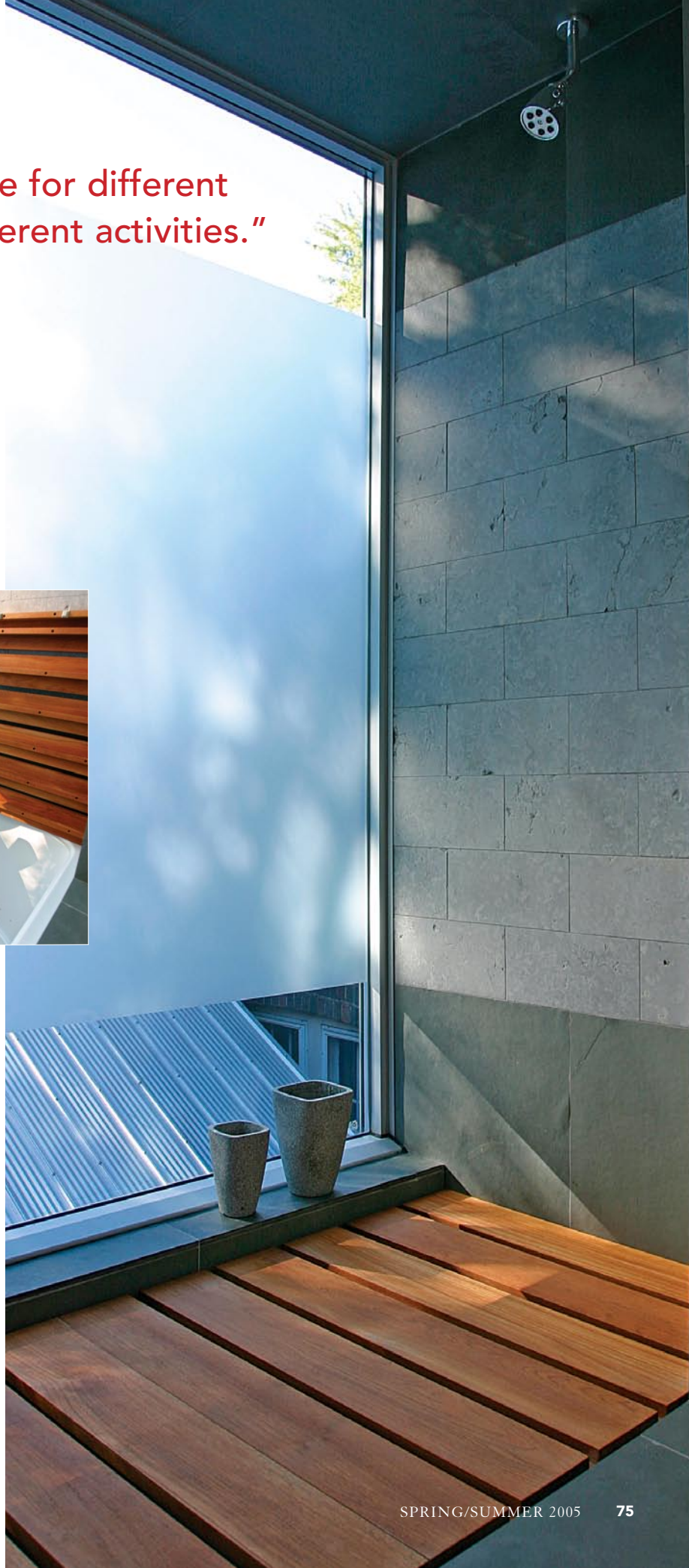
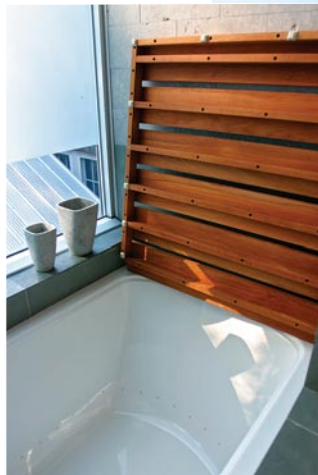
In the evening, baseboard lights (www.alicoindustries.com; 905-305-6606) mark the way from the office to the kitchen. The stairways are illuminated by similar lights flush-mounted in the walls just above the treads.

To reduce the cold effect of glass in the evening, I tried to balance interior and exterior lighting. In many parts of the house, outdoor lighting illuminates the interior spaces. The courtyard-fountain lights illuminate the kitchen and the main living areas, and rooftop fixtures bring light through the skylights and into the kitchen. Exterior lighting shines on the sandblasted-glass shower wall to light the bathroom. With balanced interior and exterior lighting, the reflective aspect of glass is reduced, and the interior spaces are extended visually.

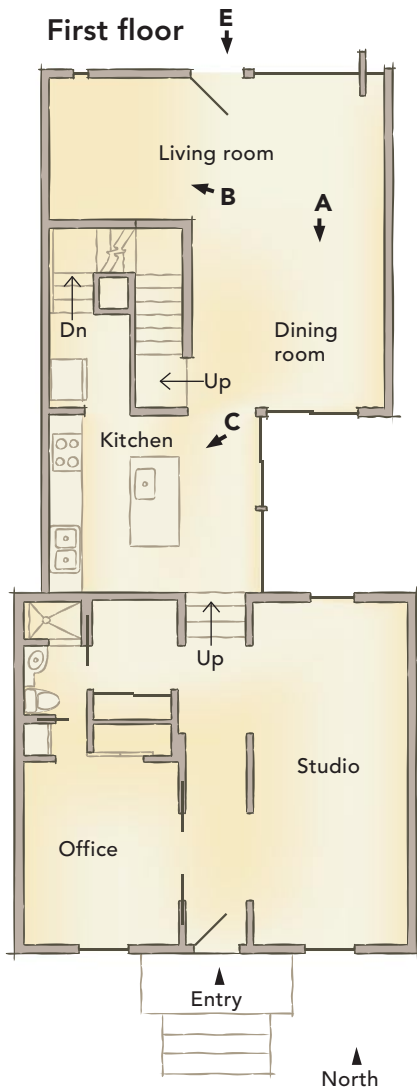
No need for curtains

The greatest challenge in the design of this house was to create interior spaces and views that extend outdoors

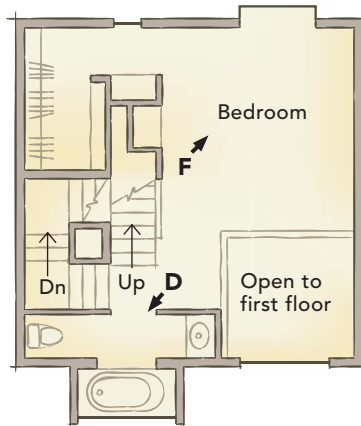
Daylighting in the shower? The sandblasted-glass exterior wall and teak plank floor give the feel of an outdoor shower. For a soak, lift up the floor to access a full tub (inset photo). Photo taken at D on floor plan.



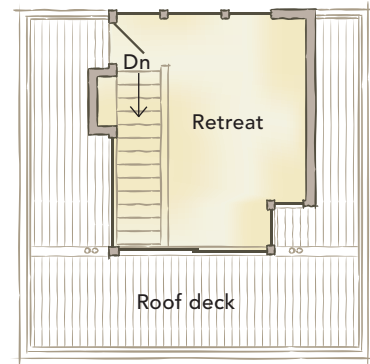
HOME AND OFFICE MEET IN THE KITCHEN



Second floor



Third floor



The studio and office get street-front priority, and the three-story residence is set back for privacy. The kitchen is a portal between these areas. Without doors between these areas, the whole first floor is public space. The second-floor bedroom and third-floor retreat make up the private portions of the house, though they are planned carefully to maximize outdoor views.

Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 2 4 8 ft.

SPECS

Bedrooms: 1

Bathrooms: 2

Size: 2000 sq. ft.

Cost: \$175 per sq. ft.

Completed: 2002

Location: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Architect: John O'Connor

Builder: Basis Design Build



MAILBOX

METAL DETAILS EXPAND FINISH POSSIBILITIES

I always have been interested in incorporating metal details into my designs. Metal is solid and durable, and it gives permanence to the sometimes temporary aspect of wood-frame construction. Metal is also a great counterpoint to wood and other warm building materials. In this house, metal is used as an applied finish—stainless steel in the kitchen back-splash and courtyard fence,

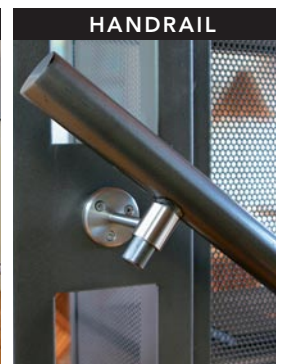
and Galvalume for the parapet walls—and as functional details. The handrails are round and square metal tubes. The perforated bookshelf panels provide a rigid surface while allowing views and light to pass through.

The installation details and finishes for metalwork are unfamiliar to many builders,

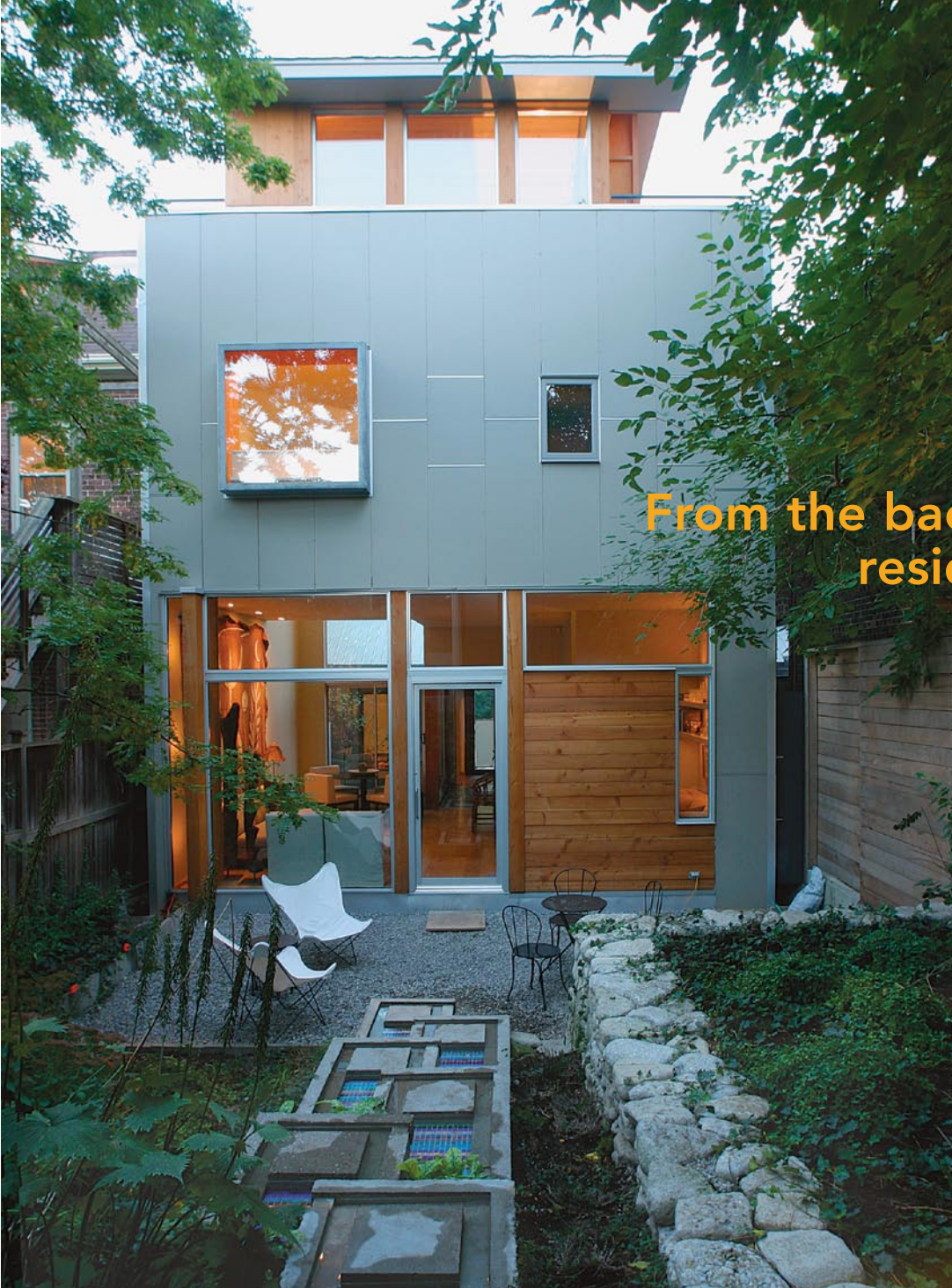
so it is best that the craftsman who made the metal detail also be there to install it. In Toronto, we are lucky to have a wealth of specialized craftsmen from around the world. The best part of my job is designing and building unique architectural elements with people who are passionate about their craft.



BOOKSHELF



HANDRAIL



The three-story home, privacy fences, and gardens shelter the outdoor space from the urban surroundings. The waterfall staircase is fun and functional. A modern version of a bay window frames a limited view from the master bedroom. Bottom-up shades allow you to close part of a window without blocking sunlight. Photo left taken at E on floor plan; photo below taken at F.

From the backyard, a modern residence is revealed



without compromising the need for privacy in an urban neighborhood.

A careful analysis of adjacent buildings, trees, sunlight, and seasonal changes showed me where there were opportunities for views that wouldn't need to be covered with curtains. For example, the three-story portion of the house is set back just enough so that the cottage roof blocks the sightline from the city street to the large bedroom window.

Oriented on a south-facing lot with neighbors close by on both sides, the house has little exposure to late-day sun. However, the third floor's western views capture the sunset and the city skyline. Here, the glass doors and

windows are set back from the parapet wall so that it is impossible to see inside the house from the street.

In some places, architectural devices made outdoor views more private. A deep, square bay window in the second-floor bedroom frames a view of the garden while screening the view to the neighbors on each side. An oversize column extends through the glass exterior wall on the back of the house to shield the view of the neighbors' yards. □

John O'Connor owns Basis Design Build (www.basisdesignbuild.com) in Toronto, Ont., Canada. Photos by Brian Pontolilo.