

Condo CHAMELEON

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ou know those home renos where “the reveal” moves people to tears? This is one of them. “My mother-in-law actually cried when she first saw the place,” says Laura De Sousa. “It truly is an amazing transformation that I’m so proud of.”

And rightly so. When Laura, her husband Silverio and their children (Bianca, now 10, and Tiago, now 6) moved into the 1,050-square-foot two-bedroom condo in 2014, the space – all

builder finishes, bad lighting and no storage – did not stir pride. It did, however, boast a prime location near Burrard Inlet with beautiful parks and kid-friendly hiking trails. So, they lived with it. But as the children grew, the couple had to decide: renovate or move to a three-bedroom? They loved the area so much, they opted to stay and hire designer Erica James, a friend of Laura’s since grade school, to reimagine the condo. →

Fresh decor, ingenious design solutions and upgraded finishes turn a Port Moody condo into a family home.

TEXT CHRISTY WRIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHY TRACEY AYTON

The fresh and unfussy kitchen balances luxury finishes with child-friendly durability. “The homeowner really wanted marble somewhere in the kitchen,” says designer Erica James. “It’s a high-maintenance surface, especially with kids around, so I used it for the backsplash, a perfect place to show it off, and chose easy-to-clean quartz for the countertops.” The bistro-style barstools, which nicely echo the overall colour palette, are also easy to wipe. Shiplap adds interest to the living room wall and wraps around all the way to the kitchen’s range hood.

DESIGN, Erica James Design; **CONTRACTING**, Tim and Richard Boyd, Northline Contracting; white oak **FLOORING**, Goodfellow; **BARN DOORS**, Poco Building Supplies; wall and upper cabinetry **PAINT COLOUR**, Chantilly Lace OC-65, lower cabinetry, Stonington Grey HC-170, Benjamin Moore; **CABINETY FRAMES**, IKEA; custom **CABINETY DOORS**, Switch Door; **KNOBS**, Emtek; **COUNTER-TOPS**, Stone Express; **FAUCET**, Brizo; Marble **BACKSPLASH**, C&S Tiles; **APPLIANCES**, Midland Appliances; **BARSTOOLS**, Serena and Lily; **MIRROR**, Style in Form; **SHIPLAP**, Metrie; Blue French door **ARTWORK**, Erica James Design.



The owners' table (a clearance-sale find) is surrounded by actionable design ideas, including a gallery wall of family photos and banquette seating that's covered in easy-to-clean vinyl and fitted with discreet storage drawers below. Cream chairs are an attractive contrast to the wood table. Of the great light fixture, Erica says: "I wanted something that would have impact and a bit of a French vibe, yet not distract from the gallery wall."

Louvre **ARTWORK, CHAIRS, THROW** and bench **CUSHIONS**, Erica James Design; Darlana Medium **PENDANT LIGHT**, Visual Comfort; **BENCH DOORS**, Switch Door.



"The kids never set foot in the house during the reno, so it was a big surprise. They were over-the-moon excited."

— Laura De Sousa

"I wanted to make it a cozy, comfortable family home, while respecting Laura's desire for a fresh, modern feel," says Erica. As well as being asked to invigorate the beige aesthetic with something light and bright, the designer was tasked with the challenge of creating a third bedroom for Tiago and sneaking in some desperately needed storage space. Erica's ingenious idea of combining back-to-back pantry and walk-in closets – no major renos required – netted Tiago a bedroom, while inexpensive organizers judiciously peppered throughout the condo ticked the storage box (and made up for the lost closet space now allocated to Tiago's room).

The kitchen also underwent small fixes that gained big results. A new island was pushed a little farther into the living area to net more floor space. "That very small change made the kitchen much more efficient and easy to use," says Laura. Erica employed another

resourceful idea here. "I replaced the cabinetry, which had cheap hollow brown doors, with an IKEA system," she explains. "I kept the IKEA framework but upgraded the doors with custom ones that were painted and dressed up with new hardware."

To impart a more cohesive and expansive feel throughout, the designer replaced the mishmash of wall-to-wall carpeting and dated, honey-coloured wood floors with European white oak. "The oak's lighter tones make the space feel bright, while still adding warmth," says Erica. The brightness features in the overall palette: muddy beige walls were painted white for a fresh presence, and new furniture, in shades of white and oatmeal, visually enlarge and enliven the rooms. Thoughtful touches, such as accent pieces in natural wood tones and dashes of what Erica calls "Parisian blues and greys," layer in a rich, calm feel that adds depth to the pale scheme. →

“We didn’t use window coverings in the living room where *the view is nice* and there’s no need for privacy.”

– Erica James



The living room’s sectional offers ample family seating, while the sculptural chair strikes an elegant note. The IKEA shelf above the TV was wrapped in leftover flooring for smart continuity, and the floating credenza – another IKEA piece that was transformed with custom doors and hardware – provides plenty of closed storage (the family’s Xbox lives here).



ABOVE & BELOW Visual texture was a key design element in a predominantly one-colour palette. Shiplap-clad walls, furniture and accessories play a part to that end. Erica opted for a marble-topped coffee table (it links to the kitchen backsplash) and accessories with impact. “Little details like wooden beads and natural

grasses make a house feel like a home,” she says.

CHAIR, THROW, BEADS, TRAY, Erica James Design; **LACK SHELF,** Besta **CABINETRY FRAME** and **DOOR PULLS,** IKEA; custom **CABINETRY DOORS,** Switch Door; **FLOOR LAMP, STUMP,** Style in Form **SECTIONAL,** Van Gogh Designs; rectangular **CUSHION,** Anthropology; **COFFEE TABLE, CB2;** **RUG,** West Elm.



Texture also brings an edge to the space that dry-wall alone simply couldn't. Erica used creative wall treatments, such as wood panelling in the master bedroom, shiplap in the living room and kitchen, and murals and decals in the kids' rooms to create visual interest and elevate otherwise plain walls.

It all adds up to a happy, comfortable design that changed the condo completely. "There isn't one person that walks into our home that is not completely floored by the transformation," says Laura. "Not even my mother-in-law!"

"The soft palette and textures make me feel like I'm in a hotel. I never want to leave."

— Laura De Sousa



ABOVE Erica used inexpensive panelling to create the master bedroom's focal wall. She carved out extra storage space wherever she could. The elegant bed lifts up, providing space to stash off-season clothes and bedding in the small condo.

LEFT Erica added art on the side wall where the walk-in closet used to be. "The art imparts colour and dimension to the room and Laura loves it because it has a whimsical, European feel," she says.

OPPOSITE, TOP Black marble accessories corral makeup.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT Wall-mounted sconces evenly light the face from both sides for a flattering effect. The strong symmetry has impact.

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT A space-saving barn door leads to the master ensuite; its hardware references the bathroom's black-framed mirror.

ARTWORK, RUG, BOLSTER PILLOW, Erica James Design; **LIGHT, MIRROR, BLACK MARBLE ACCESSORIES**, CB2; **BED**, Style in Form; **BEDDING**, Winners; **SCONCES**, Hudson Valley; **FAUCET**, Brizo; **VANITY**, IKEA (USA).





BELOW & LEFT Bianca's bedroom delights with happy-go-lucky colours and a super cool mural. "I created this using tape, paint and a good contractor," says Erica. It cost less than \$200 and has the look of more expensive wallpaper. The mirror over her bed reflects the graphic design and throws a curve at the

sharp angles. Pretty hearts on the bedding glow in the dark. This family home is barefoot-friendly: a fluffy pink rug is a girly touch under the desk area by the bright window. Bonus points: the rug adds visual and actual texture.

DESK, LAMP, NIGHTSTAND, MIRROR, IKEA; BEDDING, Pottery Barn Teen; RUG, Fibre.



ABOVE & RIGHT The condo's main bathroom is small and windowless but you'd never notice that thanks to Erica's use of soft pinks, warm brass, floor-to-ceiling tiled walls and custom inlay tiled floor. "The kids mostly use this bathroom so I wanted it to feel cute and special," she says.

Subway, floor **TILES, Ames; MIRROR, TOWELS, SHOWER CURTAIN, West Elm; SCONCE, Hudson Valley; VANITY, IKEA (USA); FAUCETS, SHOWERHEAD, Brizo; BATHMAT, Erica James Design.**

"Erica helped me through the *design process* with vision boards that really helped narrow down the options."

— Laura De Sousa

What could be cuter than house-proud Tiago in his brand new tricked-out bedroom? "His room is small with no windows, so I had to make it as light, bright and fun as possible," says Erica. She added decals, a bookshelf, and painted the bunk bed grey. Tiago sleeps on the top bunk, which let Erica turn the bottom section into a fort, complete with

string lights inside and around the perimeter. "The fort's inexpensive curtains were made using a duvet cover and extendable shower rod," she says. Mirrored closet doors expand the space by doubling the light.

DECALS, Urban Wall Decals; **BED, SHELF, CLOSET**, IKEA; **BEDDING, PILLOW, BANNER**, Pottery Barn Kids.

FOR SOURCES, SEE OUR WORKBOOK



"Tiago calls this his *spaceship*.
This is his happy place."
— Laura De Sousa



▶ Polyester **RUG**, 24" x 42", \$50, Bouclair, bouclair.ca.



▶ Milo **NIGHTSTAND**, \$188, Home Depot, homedepot.ca.



▶ PEONY on artificial stem, \$10, Bouclair, bouclair.ca.



▶ Plastic and wood **CHAIR**, \$108, Wayfair, wayfair.ca.



▶ Architect Table **LAMP**, \$42, Rona, rona.ca.



Get the look



▶ Lillåsen **DESK**, \$179, IKEA, ikea.ca.