



## A 'Why didn't I think of that?' Rosedale reno

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Too often in real estate write-ups, the writer does a disservice to the reader by simply describing a space blow-by-blow: this room leads to that one, then we arrive at the master bedroom, blah, blah, blah. Sometimes, these same pieces lavish too much attention on furniture pieces or other impermanent objects, such as collections. This does a disservice to the architect, since it reduces him or her to the role of interior decorator.

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I'm sure I've been guilty of falling into this comfortable, fur-lined literary trap, so I'll kindly ask that you don't check up on me.

The thing is, architects are problem solvers, with a unique skill set that has taken years of sacrifice to sharpen and perfect. Rare creatures who can harness both hemispheres of the brain, architects combine scientific, logical thinking with artful creativity to come up with solutions that amaze those of us who labour, most days, with only half a brain (of course I speak only of myself here).

Take, for example, this late-1960s Rosedale semi on Glen Road, just below South Drive. Fashioned in the 'Conquistador-modern' style that was popular at the time – dark brick, amber-glass coach lamps, archways and urns – this skinny, 12-foot-wide-on-the-outside, 10-foot-wide-on-the-inside home was seriously lacking in light, a relationship to the back garden, and a way for occupants to 'read' its full length, which happily stretches back into the long lot. Homeowners entered at the side of the building onto a landing placed halfway between the ground and second levels, which not only wasted space, it generated a feeling of disconnection. Rooms were placed off of long corridors, boxcar-like, and windows on each end of the building were small, so what little light entered the space didn't make it very far.

"We like when we have constraints, when we're dealing with a tight site because you start to really be clever about how things get divided up and how things relate," says Andre D'Elia, a co-founder of the

decade-old firm Superkül, who first confronted this space in late 2007. “Some decisions become automatic, almost, where you think, ‘okay, we want to get light deep into every space so how do you do that’; we want to separate, programmatically, people, and have a spot where they can come together; [and we want] a connection to the landscape [that’s] not just on one floor.”

Easy for him to say.

The bricks-and-mortar solutions arrived at by Superkül do look easy and “automatic,” but only in a “why didn’t I think of it?” kind of way. First, the decision was made to move the entrance to ground level; this simple change led to an immediate connection with the rest of the space, and a reclamation of the back garden, which is helped further by placing the barbecue along the same wall as the kitchen appliances inside; enlarging and placing the kitchen on the main level (it had been on the second level) brings the home into the 21st century.

Light penetration was handled two ways. First, small pairs of windows on the front and rear elevations were replaced with single large openings. The big move, however, was to cut away floor space on levels two and three to create a dramatic, sky-lit, 30-foot-tall atrium that rains photons into every corner of the home, all the way down to the dining table resting on heated limestone floors; at night, a cluster of globe pendants – assembled by Superkül using single fixtures – performs a similar function.

“We do that pretty often,” says the soft-spoken architect. “We try to carve space away by creating a taller or a sectional quality through the house to make it feel bigger and to draw that connection between the different floors; when they tend to be very narrow and long, the connection between floors is important – at least we feel so.”

Bigger? To a non-architect, removing floor space in a small home feels wrong, as if property values decrease with the removal of each square foot. But what price do we place on light? Or on the way a space makes us feel? What’s visual harmony worth? Today, this is a home where there are psychological transitions to be made rather than mere spaces to move through.

Where there is separation, such as between the master bedroom and the living room on the second floor, it’s handled elegantly, via a new ‘bridge’ that does more than a hallway could ever do.

Tying the whole composition together are big, white-oak screens on every floor. Viewed from the kitchen, the screen is opaque; move closer, and the slats reveal the staircase (remember, as a kid, only being able to determine who had a pool once you were right beside their fence?). This, explains Mr. D’Elia, is because a stair can overpower a small space if one isn’t careful. On the two upper levels, the screen forms a balcony wall, where the homeowner can reach over and grab a cord if a light bulb needs to be replaced.

Sometimes, writers find it hard to see the architectural forest for the trees. When a space is this good, however, it’s a no brainer.

