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A west Toronto home shackled by too many interior walls is opened up
PAGE 5

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SECTION G

Globe Real Estate



WHITE ON WHITE

North Toronto clients of architect Cindy Rendely asked for white. They got white PAGE 2

A poetic handling of spatial flow gives a buzz to what might otherwise be an austere interior. SCOTT NORSWORTHY

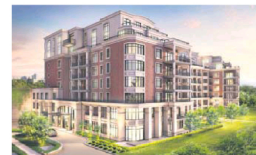
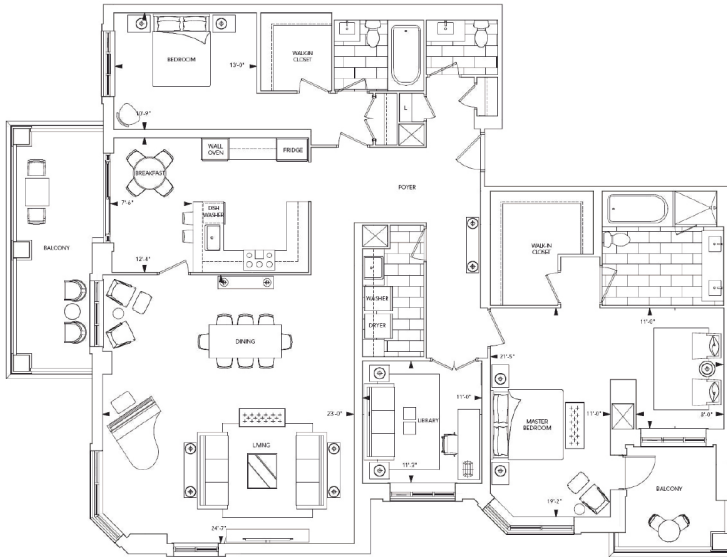
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EDITOR: D'ARCY McGOVERN

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Cool white

A North Toronto house displays a poetic handling of spatial flow



JOHN BENTLEY MAYS
THE PERFECT HOUSE
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Toronto architect Cindy Rendely has done a white two-level house in a residential neighbourhood near Havergal College. In fact, it is one of the whitest houses I have ever reviewed here.

The boxy, flat-roofed streetside façade is clad in brick, painted white. Inside, the lacquered cabinetry and attractively matte tubs and sinks, the oak and limestone floors and all but a couple of small walls are white, or whitish. The walls that aren't have been surfaced with taupe felt (in the family room), or with jolly wallpaper – parrots and monkeys and other tropical creatures in the bathroom of the master suite, pink flamingos in a child's bathroom. There is a little art, and some furniture is dark. Otherwise, the 3,300-square-foot dwelling is as free of colour as fresh milk.

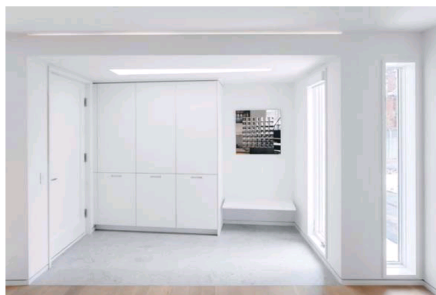
Which is not to say it is monotonous or cold. I might have thought it was both, if all I had to go on were some photographs. As I found while visiting this house last week, pictures don't really tell its best story, which is about alert, sensitive orderings of space, and small moves that give buzz to the austere interior.

Designed by Ms. Rendely for a young couple with two little children and a strong idea of what they wanted, the house started as a renovation of an elderly, unexceptional North Toronto family house. But the fabric of the old building, as things turned out when the work began, was too frail to survive an overhaul. The couple then decided to go with new construction, and that is what the architect has given them – all new, she told me, with the exception of two exterior walls. (One of them is visible, warts and all, in the garage.)

The clients live casually, don't entertain a lot and conduct most of their communal living in the spacious, well-appointed kitchen, which opens through a glass wall toward the deck and deep back yard and pool, and in an adjoining family room. There is no dining room and meals are taken



The heart of the house is in the spacious, well-appointed kitchen, which includes a large island where the owners do most of their dining. SCOTT NORSEWORTHY



If architecture is 'frozen music,' then an all-white house is a symphony without sharps or flats, John Bentley Mays observes. SCOTT NORSEWORTHY

either at the massive kitchen island or at a small but expandable table. From what Ms. Rendely and her client had to say about this spot, I gather that it is the heart of the house – a centre of good cooking and eating around which the whole household revolves.

Still, they wanted a small formal living room, which is the right size for the baby grand piano. When I asked what happened in this room (which struck me as the least-loved place in the layout), the lady of the house said: not much. Nobody plays the dignified old Bechstein and

an early vision of hosts and guests chatting over drinks in front of the fireplace so far has not materialized. The kids play there occasionally.

But the living room is not devoid of character, and one can hope that a use other than as a play area will be found for it. The wall in which the firebox has been installed, for example, has been faced with lustrous, seamless Corian (white, of course), which sets up a subtle textural contrast with the adjacent (white) drywall. And instead of housing the oblong skylight near the front door in a plain box, Ms. Rendely has used the occasion of needed light to create a lovely aperture with folded, sculpted interior surfaces.

Very quiet architectural gestures of this sort can easily be overlooked: I, for one, didn't notice the artistically inventive skylight before the architect drew my attention to it.

More unmissable, however, is Ms. Rendely's poetic handling of spatial flow between room and room, past shuttings and

through openings. Unpredictably placed walls and portals and turning points give lift and even a touch of intimate drama to one's transit through both floors of the house. The planning that makes passage through the interior interesting and pleasing has been lucidly thought out, and the result is never confused or confusing. This is architecture that is alive to the fact that people need music, as well as solid shelter, in the places they call home.

But while this house delivers music structurally and spatially, I hesitate to call the project a complete aesthetic success, since it is just too white. Stark, flat white surfaces are dead without art or contrasting textures to enliven them. If architecture is "frozen music," as the philosopher Friedrich von Schelling once said, then an all-white house is a symphony composed without sharps or flats. All that whiteness, of course, is what the clients desired, although I imagine the day they become weary of it is not far off.

ON SITE BY SYDNIA YU

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Thornhill project boasts size advantage

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Developer the Conservatory Group says one particular characteristic is setting its new Thornhill project apart from its competitors: Sheer size.

"We are maximizing the square footage of the houses," says partner Mark Libfeld.

"While other competitors go around 4,000 square feet, we go up to double – to 8,000 square

feet in total," a size more common in areas like The Bridle Path.

"You feel the sense of true wealth and luxury – at a reasonable price."

Conservatory's Dalston plan, for instance, features a dining room nearly 20-feet wide, a great room 40-feet wide and a master retreat larger than both, combined with a rotunda, dressing room, shoe closet and ensuite bathroom with an oval tub.



Upper West Side by the Conservatory Group offers large, luxury houses on 41-foot and 50-foot wide lots.

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There are "a lot of cathedral ceilings – even in the master bedrooms – some as much as 14- or 16-feet high," that add to the feeling of grandeur, Mr. Libfeld said. "In some of the models, the master bedroom is open to a loft above ... which is something you only see in seven-, eight- or \$10-million homes."

Less than \$2.3-million can buy most models at Upper West Side. Conservatory is adding 175 homes to the low-rise community at the northwest corner of Bathurst Street and Major Mackenzie Drive. The company said 520 out of 700 properties on the site have already sold.

"This is a unique enclave of custom homes," said Sam Moses, vice-president of Norman Hill Realty, which is handling sales for the infill site, which is likely the last off Bathurst Street. "It's a very high demand

area ... if you want to go suburban. It's got all the conveniences; shopping and infrastructure is there."

The company is offering 41- and 50-foot lots, including some abutting forested areas and parks with paths and ponds.

"It has the feel of Forest Hill, where a lot of the houses were custom done by different architects and builders," Mr. Moses said.

The collection offers two-storey elevations with garages, grand eat-in kitchens and great rooms and even auxiliary spaces, such as sitting rooms, serveries or a spiral staircase. Minimum nine-foot ceilings are standard, as is upscale hardwood flooring, granite kitchen counters and stainless steel appliances.

Occupancy will start next summer. The company is adding a \$40,000 bonus for decor.