

# condo *couture*

Combining luxury and simplicity, a designer transforms a predictable townhouse into high design

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A modern dining room featuring a large, rectangular glass table with a light green tint. The table is surrounded by black chairs with a curved backrest. On the table, there is a centerpiece of driftwood, a vase of white flowers, and a small black lantern. A large, abstract painting with warm tones hangs on the wall. A long, white, cylindrical pendant light hangs above the table. The floor is made of dark wood.

**KITCHEN COUTURE** With its close proximity to living and dining areas, integrating the look of a serviceable bar with a functional kitchen was required for the centre of the main floor. While combining a stylish and sensible layout, a lack of upper cabinets on the main kitchen wall removes excess bulk at eye level and promotes a more airy feel. "Rift-cut" cherry panels with a walnut stain and protective coating act as architectural backplash, their horizontal grain and uniform width elongate the room creating openness.



John Kazmir is a man with great vision. How else can one explain what has transpired at a once predictable townhouse at the edge of St. Catharines? From drab to chic, almost retired to truly inspired, the renewed space now shines with a freshness that defies its 35 years. And that's just the way this designer likes to operate: unexpectedly.

Drawing on talents sharpened from a career spanning over 30 years, Kazmir approached this personal renovation with the same insightful mastery he offers his design clients and followed his own credo: take what is and make it better. After deciding to sell his weekend retreat—a contemporary lakefront cottage in Dunnville, he packed up his beach mementos and began scouting for scaled-back living with something new to discover. What he found surprised even him. Admittedly, on paper, the place “was absolutely everything I didn't want,” he now jokes, but that didn't stop him from being charmed by the exciting possibilities of transformation once he saw it.

The core structure already had some of the features he was searching for, including lots of natural light from large windows on all sides and a main floor master bedroom with an ensuite bath, both typically difficult to find in a 1970s era townhouse. With some creative planning, removing walls and balancing proportions, a new, open interior layout of 1,150 square feet (107 square metres) materialized. It also expanded the possibilities of what can be achieved for these often dated structures dotting the Niagara region.

He completed the total redesign last August after about six months, and quite effectively realized one of his long abiding objectives: to “combine luxury with simplicity and understatement.”

The redefined space begins at the front entryway, revealing a seamless arrangement of essentials: a foyer offering a large concealed closet, an elegant guest powder room, office area with a wall of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, and a reconfigured open riser staircase railed by wood atop stainless steel down to the lower level. It's a first impression that sets the tone for the rest of the home and shows the real benefit of expertise, thoughtfully encompassing practical needs within a well-executed design.

Incorporating the many sculptural aspects from nature he loves—tall, twisty



## LIVING LARGE IN TINY TOWN

**Design Tip:** When designing for smaller, one area/multi-use spaces, use similar surfaces and materials throughout, as Kazmir does by repeating the kitchen wall panels as a natural extension into the adjacent living area. This “trompe l’oeil,” or trick of the eye, helps unify the space while giving the illusion of a much larger room. **Design Myth:** Smaller spaces require smaller pieces. Not so. Instead, make every square foot count by using scale and proportion to your advantage. A lesser-sized couch can feel uncomfortable visually if it fails to properly fill the available space. One or two larger choices can be a great grounding for a room and provide a definite focal point.



branches in clear glass vases lending statuesque height, chunks of driftwood serving as earthy centerpieces, and carved wooden bowls cradling fossilized rocks from his former cottage—Kazmir gives the weathered, tactile objects prominence in the space as beautiful decor. He contrasts these organic elements perfectly beside sophisticated surfaces and refined accents for a style he connects with and calls “masculine contemporary,” a striking union of “balance and order, lights and darks, shiny and dulls.”

Topping off the polished look with a touch of glamour, a mirrored dining room wall further opens things up visually, reflecting generous table seating for ten. And a rather ironic choice of cork tile flooring in the basement wine room keeps a ready collection of vintages. Without a doubt, ample space and cellared grape are both “must have” requirements for frequent entertaining.

A lifelong Niagara resident, Kazmir turned from an accounting path early on in his schooling, when he was lured away by the seductive siren call of form and function at Niagara College. Since then, he has consistently earned his stellar reputation, opening design firm Studio 76, taking on projects in Toronto, New York state and Florida to accommodate his clients, and doing extensive commercial work throughout Niagara for wineries, luxury car showrooms, restaurants, and White Oaks Resort.

Yet his enthusiasm for residential design remains vibrant and continues to inform his work, allowing for a great flexibility of styles and an important



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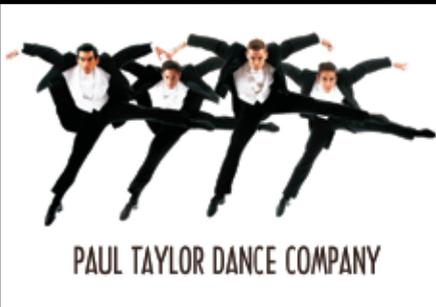
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**A MATTER OF PRIVACY** With a master bedroom and ensuite just off of the main living area, Kazmir emphasizes the need for distinction of areas. He notes, “In one-floor living there’s no real keen separation between the public space and private space.” To achieve a feeling of retreat and sanctuary, he painted the entire bedroom—including ceiling—a dark peppercorn colour, creating an obvious division of room function. The only time you should feel like you’re “sleeping in your living room” is if you happen to own a sleeper couch.

**A LAKEFRONT ENSUITE** Employing a “modified contemporary” style, Kazmir changed all doors throughout the space to a natural frosted glass with oil-rubbed bronze handles. Diffused light filters everywhere, allowing a spacious quality while still granting privacy. Earthy tones in the one-by-two inch mosaic tiles are reminiscent of tile once used at his lakefront cottage, and call to mind the sheets of bedrock along the shore of Lake Erie.



collaborative relationship with each client. Showcasing a valuable ability to conceptualize ideas, understand and adapt a client’s “touch points,” or wish list, and follow through with highly personalized spaces, Kazmir strongly believes in “getting mileage out of a renovation,” focusing on “architectural and structural decorating that will last, rather than cosmetic fixes.”

That is why he appreciates the attitude of this region, where interiors are generally motivated from a sensible commitment to permanence, rather than led by the changing tide of fashionable trends. Design should be timeless, not trapped in a time frame.

Energized by a diverse, interesting, and always surprising career, it follows that an outdated, underwhelming townhouse in need of new life caught the eye of John Kazmir. And with his own incomparable style, he will definitely leave it better than he found it. NMI