



# MODERN HISTORY

An 80-year-old 'domestic gem' gets an exciting  
makeover for the next era of living

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**BEHIND CLOSED DOORS:** A touchstone of these houses is a spectacular centre hall—this one with perimeter chestnut panelling and doors to fully ensconce the space—inviting cozy, wooden warmth to the heart of the house. As architect David Parker relates, “I felt compelled to save as much of the existing wood panelling as possible because it really was unique and so essential to the original design. The matching stairs also had to stay, as well as the wonderful oak pegged floors,” now refinished in a brighter, light-toned hue.



**RADICALLY RADIANT:** While preserving many of the original built-in radiators that were integral to parts of the overall design, Parker also sourced ceiling-reaching, Euro-styled “Column” rads by Runtal from Switzerland (now manufactured in North America), providing a discreet, sculptural element to many of the rooms. All supplied by R&D Energy Savers Ltd. in Oakville.

**PAST TIMES BEHIND:** A recurrent characteristic of these domestic gems, quaint, almost dollhouse exteriors belie the spaciousness of their welcoming interiors. Displaying an attractive, eclectic mix of materials incorporated together in colour and texture, the distinctive variations of stucco, brick, outlining trim work, slate and terracotta tiles prove to be interesting pieces of the whole. Previous homeowners were able to rescue the extra slate tiles necessary to redo portions of the roof when the nearby Glenridge School, also designed by Nicholson-MacBeth, decided to reshingle theirs a few years ago.

**G**ood design has a memorable quality, an almost tangible capacity to reach across eras with the deep resonance of familiarity, beauty and common sense.

The firm of Nicholson-MacBeth Architects, who practised in the Niagara region for a relatively short yet illustrious period during the 1920s and early 1930s, have long been recognized for their Tudor/ Arts & Crafts “domestic gems,” finding prevalence across the peninsula in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Port Dalhousie, Welland, and the Yates Street and Glenridge areas of St. Catharines with hand-crafted houses that translated “good design” principles into tasteful, elegant living for the homeowners lucky enough to inhabit them.

Their signature partnership references a period when excellence in craftsmanship and materials were strikingly dominant and brought a refined quality and character to residential architecture, while their impressive style proclaims a philosophy to do things thoughtfully and soundly trumps any lackluster housing mediocrity. Exceptional features include: multiple leaded glass windows, luxurious old growth woods (most either too scarce or costly to use today), one-of-a-kind artisan carving on mantelpieces, and architect designed touches such as distinctive iron cupboard latches and hinges harmonizing with the overall appearance. »





With this uniqueness in mind, it is notable when one of these 80-year-old classics undergoes an exciting renovation for the next era of living amid its Old Glenridge neighbourhood.

**I**ts latest residents approached local design architect David Parker, the head of St. Catharines based Parker Architects, who was slightly hesitant at first to alter the esteemed work of the Nicholson-MacBeth firm and replicate the clients' request for the more modern feeling and spare detailing on another of his projects, Parker's "High-on-Rye" accomplishment in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Once discussed, however, everyone involved respectfully embraced a sensitive evolution to the original design, preserving its best aspects as they incorporated newer, advantageous elements of today.

This project's objective for the homeowners was bringing light into the dark spaces of the roughly 2,500-square-foot home and keeping a continuity to its authenticity. Keenly seeking to avoid any "false sense of design replica," they wished to convey an understated, minimalist esthetic alongside its traditional ethos. »

It made sense, then, to not try to compete with or copy what the house already offered, like precisely matching existing flooring or



**TUDOR TWOSOME:** With another neighbouring Nicholson-MacBeth home steps away, there were formerly adjacent doors between the kitchens, permitting servants and family to walk between the two with ease. To maximize room, Parker's new design removed the door to provide space for the larger, more modern appliances. Ikea's Abstrakt cabinetry is finished in a clean looking high gloss white, with the countertop a stone grey Cambria Caesarstone installed by Star Tile Centre of Fonthill.

panelling using vintage-looking wood, but rather to complement it with a stylish, smart architectural honesty. From the beginning, anything added to the design was kept straightforward, selecting a gallery white, unobtrusive background palette and clean-lined, contemporary furnishings throughout.

**T**he actual design concept only took one month to settle on, with the final plan and construction taking about four months, commencing this past summer.

Granted, certain structural aspects also needed to be changed to accommodate more modern necessities. A tight galley kitchen was opened up into its adjacent dining area for additional convenience, and an enclosed summer sunroom was turned into an office location at the rear of the home. And when they happily discovered the basement was on the same elevation as the backyard sloping toward the ravine, it was logical to integrate a walkout from the level for accessing a redesigned garden.

Fundamental to the new front foyer space is the decision of allowing as much brightness into the home as possible. After realizing the layout above the centre hall provided two bathrooms that could be relocated elsewhere on the second level, Parker and the homeowners

opted to remove the section of upstairs flooring, opening the height and transforming it into a graceful glass-walled walkway between the bedrooms. The resulting ceiling clearance and upper window affords the desired, generous natural light to filter into the lower portion of the house.

Even so, the street frontage of the house remains mostly untouched, left in its original impression to blend with the charming historic surroundings as expansive windows at the back now span the width of the house exposing the seasonal vistas of the 12 Mile Creek valley landscape.

Admirably facing the challenge to bring a purposeful layer of contemporary insight that doesn't compromise intrinsic heritage, this achievement is definitely a praiseworthy generational transition for a Nicholson-MacBeth beauty. NMI

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