

OpenHouse

Interior designer **Michel Arcand** added custom features to a modernist cube of a townhouse on Mutual St, creating a livable and whimsical contemporary space that showcases his partner Barr Gilmore's extensive art collection by Gordon Bowness • photos by Nicola Betts and Tom Arban



What attracted you to the Radio City townhouses? As soon as I saw the plans I knew. I was so excited because of a) the size, 2,000 square feet, b) they're right downtown Toronto, and c) being a commercial designer, this is like an office building. It's all poured concrete. I have a level of comfort with that kind of structure. They're super solid, super soundproof and good fire protection. We are lucky to have these structures. The developer was able to capitalize on the cranes erected for the towers, which made poured concrete townhouses feasible.

Your partner Barr Gilmore is also a designer with a strong passion

for visual art. How was it working together to plan the house? Super easy. Super simple. Barr is the curator for the art; I'm furniture and design. And we completely trust each other.

Why do you think your styles complement each other so well? It's so successful because it's vintage meets modern, vintage meets contemporary. And we are both collectors. Perfect example: He had the table, I had the chairs. Our stuff was incredibly compatible. And we both wanted humour. Like the Louis XVI settee — we knew it was the missing piece for the living room. We didn't want anything austere or banal.

There are many splashes of vibrant

blue. As a French Canadian, I call it Grand Bleu, inspired by Luc Besson.

Once you moved in, what surprised you, what did you discover here that made you happy? Hearing the kids during recess [the house is across from Church Street Public School]. When we are sitting in our office you hear them screaming their hearts out. It's a very happy break in our day. Yes, we are in the gay village but it is actually a real village — kids, many parents, a lot of dogs, a bit of everything.

Where did you study? I graduated from Ryerson in 1986 with a Bachelors of Applied Arts in Interior Design. It was one of only two programs in the country

that offered a degree in interior design and my father would only let me take interior design if I got a degree out of it.

After working with large design firms you decided this year to start your own firm. Why? After 24 years you get to be almost too senior and too expensive and not too many people can carry you... so they laid me off. Best day of my life. I knew that was the only way to get me to start my own company. Don't get me wrong, I do have sleepless nights and every day is an adventure. But I love it.

Are you going to specialize? You know what I love about what I'm doing right now? I'm doing whatever comes



UPSTAIRS HALLWAY: Lisa Neighbour's macramé light sculpture and vintage Fritz Hansen's Arne Jacobsen Egg foot stool. **LIVING ROOM:** Vintage mint vinyl chairs and ottomans, Louis XVI settee reproduction from Trianon and Ruben coffee table by Keilhauer. On the custom-clad fireplace are Dimitri Papatheodorou's "Intimate Immensity Series" and one image from Matthias Herrmann's "Photo Booth." You can see Katherine Harvey's "Water" paintings reflected in Sebastian Wong's convex mirror. **DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM:** Vintage ceramic light shades frame a portrait of Pooh by friend Terry Stuckless. **BEDROOM:** Pooh, the 2 1/2-year-old Labradoodle, Barr Gilmore and Michel Arcand sit on Gilmore and Lisa Visser's "Deferred Gratification," a blanket made from repurposed thrift store fur coats. Katie Bethune Leaman's "Self Portrait as 17th-Century Dutch Merchant" and Carlo Cesta's "Mirage" are visible in the background. **TV ROOM** (second floor): Sno-Man beanbag chair sculpture by Fastwürms, silkscreen print "AIDS" by General Idea, Movie sofa with remote control and Karim Rashid's Kurveman lounge chair, both from Nienkamper.

my way. I was in mostly commercial/corporate for all these years, and want to keep doing that, but I also like residential and exhibit design. Every week I am given a new opportunity.

What current projects get you excited? One of the best projects we have going on right now is Barr and I are moving the Tim Burton show at the Museum of Modern Art from New York to Toronto and TIFF's new Bell/Lightbox. Apparently it's the first MoMA show ever to come to Toronto.

A question for Barr: What does art bring to your home and lives?

I've been making and collecting art since the late '80s. A lot of my collec-

tion has been given to me or has been traded for design services, but I do make a point of buying at least one original work by a young Canadian artist each year. There's a lot of young emerging talent in this country. Michel and I both enjoy mixing genres and creating fun juxtapositions when we match artwork with furniture, craft and found objects in our home. It keeps us and our guests on their toes and always looking around the room for new visual experiences. ■

MICHEL ARCAND just finished a residential penthouse at The Murano on Bay St. He and Barr Gilmore also co-designed the Blue Line Room at the Gladstone Hotel. For more info go to arcanddesign.com.