

# STYLE at HOME

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Defined by exposed beams, natural light from two huge front and back windows, and open space, the main floor achieves a minimal loft look without sacrificing the needs of family living. In the spacious dining area, a tempered-glass tabletop and white seats – all on lightweight steel legs – maintain a sense of light and space.

# urban style

A designing couple converts a '50s triplex into a stylish home

# family living

WRITTEN BY RACHEL RAFELMAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY TED YARWOOD





The disparate dreams of two distinct design aesthetics – those of hip downtown loft dwellers and (usually suburban) family types – have both been fulfilled in Esther Cheong and Paul Fantauzzi's home in Toronto's Riverdale neighbourhood. As the owners of Z Axis Design, the husband-and-wife team have transformed a boxy 1950s triplex, creating a new hybrid – the four-bedroom family home that looks and feels like a loft.

Why a triplex? The large footprint and boxy shape were perfect for a loft look. "And at the same time we could get the family stuff – a garden, direct access to outside, a neighbourhood," says Esther. The couple combined their skills and creativity to transform a midcentury ugly duckling into a modern-day swan.

When designing the space, Esther and Paul ensured that their new home had lots of natural light and great views from inside – Esther believes you should be able to see outside from wherever you are in the house and that what you see must be pleasing. Not surprisingly, the new studio-like windows are huge. At the front and back of the house, the windows on all three floors are defined by dark wood "picture frames" that shape the exterior view into inviting vistas that are almost painterly.

Esther and Paul chose the double lot for its mature trees and

"We put the main living space toward the back of the house so we could take



Bianca's toys are tucked out of sight in the light-filled family room, which features a streamlined sofa and bench from Fluid Living. The living room, designed for adult socializing, conforms to the home's spare look. The cupboards surrounding the built-in ovens and refrigerator are seven

feet tall. An exposed steel structural beam, granite counter and dark wood define the kitchen, which is located between the family and living rooms. Below the granite counter, homeowner Esther Cheong installed a myriad of drawers and pullout storage spaces for spices and cookware.



advantage of the beautiful view and have more privacy"





## GET THAT LOFTY FEELING

Yes, you can have the best of both worlds – the family-friendliness and convenience of a suburban home and the clean, pared-to-perfection minimalism of a downtown loft. Here's how: **Expose support beams** for an instant industrial edge. **Keep floors as bare as possible**, using rugs in only a few specific areas, such as under the dining table or as part of a seating arrangement. **Leave windows uncovered**. If privacy is an issue, choose simple blinds that can be rolled up out of sight when not needed. **Get rid of clutter**. Nothing says "loft" better than tchotchke-free mantels and countertops. **Choose a neutral palette** and built-in storage. **Keep wall decor minimal**. A few choice pieces of art, like black-and-white photos, work well and are all you need.



greenery, and changed the triplex's old eyesore of a three-car garage into a cottage-style charmer surrounded by rustic flagstone walks and a garden where an asphalt parking lot once was. The backyard was also excavated to allow direct access to the garden from the home's lower level.

Inside, the loft aesthetic reigns. The cabinetry is low enough to maintain the visual flow of the space, while exposed steel structural beams are a stylish reminder of the design's industrial inspiration. There's also a strict uniformity of materials (wood, glass, steel, stone) and a virtual absence of colour. Esther and Paul dislike clutter, so nary a spice rack or coffee maker mars the kitchen counters, though there are many drawers and cupboards underneath. Even three-year-old Bianca's toys have been marshalled into specific areas and, amazingly, appear to stay there.

It might seem that this austere interior requires rigour, discipline and a meticulous approach to living that may not be suited to young children (Esther and Paul are expecting another baby in the new year). Esther looks surprised and puzzled by this notion. "Even though we're tidy, this is still a family house," she says, glancing indifferently at tiny fingerprints on the glass balusters. "They're easy to wipe off." **WHERE TO FIND IT, PAGE 166**

"People buy old houses and make them contemporary. What we wanted was a



The bedroom furniture has clean minimalist lines. Neutral linens, pale walls and the use of the same materials seen in the rest of the house give the bedroom a unified look. The vanity in the master bath extends beyond the dividing wall for additional counter space to accommodate two

sinks. The limestone wall in the bathroom is beautiful to look at from the bedroom; the vanity is perched on steel legs for a lighter look. In the front hall, glass balusters and open stairs visually expand the space. Dark wood cupboards contain a shoe storage unit and two coat closets.



loft aesthetic, but with all the accoutrements of urban family life"