



Downsizing done right: How one designer makes a big impact in a small space

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Interior designer Michel Arcand was arguably more discerning than most downsizing homeowners who make the move to a condo.

The principal at IN8 Design Inc. needed not only a comfortable place to live but a space that suited his own modern sensibility and fixation on the fine points of design.

Mr. Arcand looked around the Toronto core and decided to purchase a 13th-floor unit in the sleek, black X Condos at 110 Charles St. E. He was, he recalled on a recent summer evening, enticed by the outdoor swimming pool, a sunset view and an ordered architecture evocative of Mies van der Rohe.

“That is my cottage,” he says, looking out the window at a pool and barbecue area – raised above street level and surrounded by gardens.

Still, the day he opened the door to his newly purchased suite, he had a flash of buyer’s remorse: “I got the keys and thought: ‘What have I done?’”

After years spent establishing a house and studio that exemplified his firm’s style, he was faced with compressing his life into a unit of 700 square feet.

The prospect of maintaining a sophisticated style and housing a burgeoning art collection in roughly one-third the space of his former residence was daunting.

The first move, Mr. Arcand decided, was to create an open living and dining space by removing the partitions that demarcated a den.

He had lined up a team to begin demolition the day after the place officially became his on April 15. “By 8 a.m. on April 16, all the walls were already bashed.”

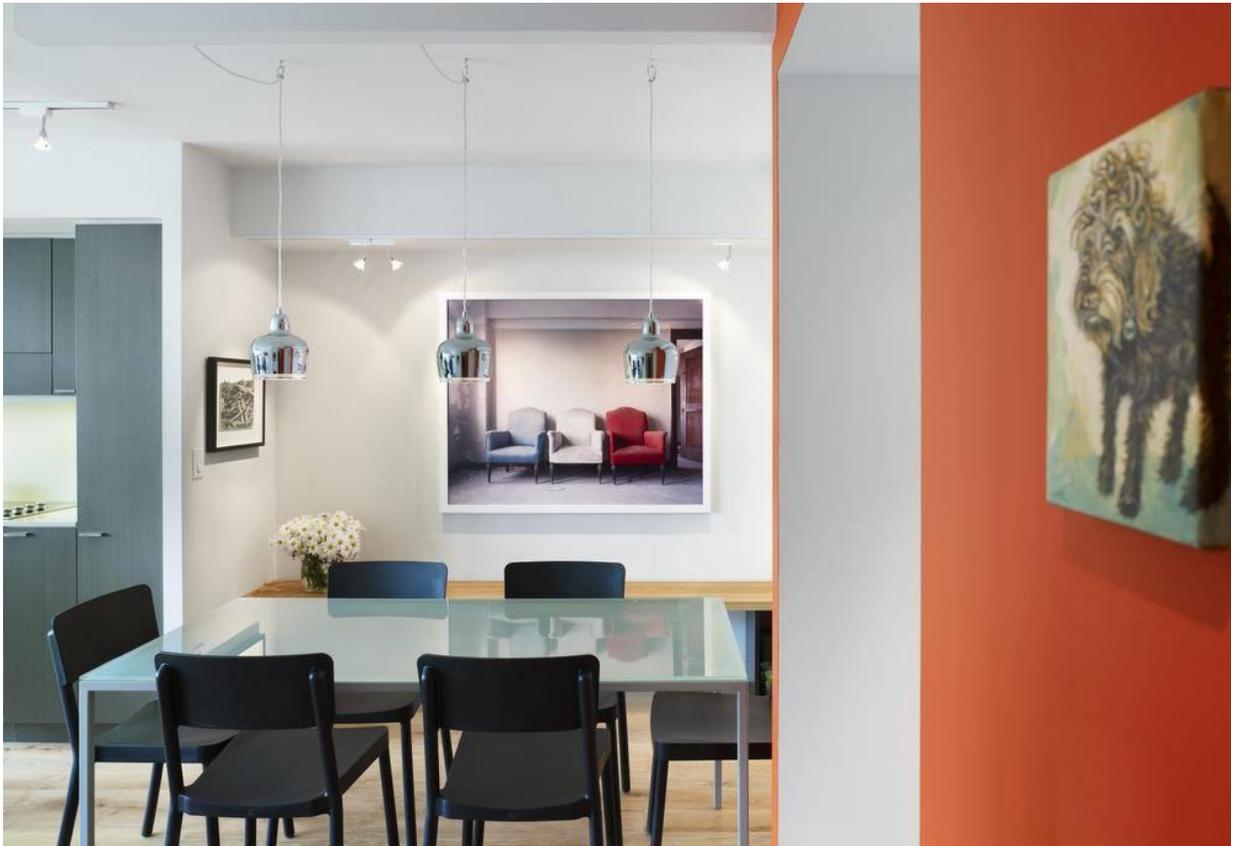


Photos by Tom Arban

Removing the walls of the den allowed him to have a glass table that doubles as a desk and a dining table.

He bought new dining chairs and added a wall-to-wall solid oak slab shelf for display and serving space. "I'm a traditionalist. I like to entertain. I like to have people over for dinner."

Since he doesn't have a guest room, Mr. Arcand plans to add a Murphy bed to the rear wall of the dining area.



On day one, a friend suggested colour blocking a section of wall with vivid orange. "That was eight coats," Mr. Arcand says of the paint required to achieve the right pigment.

For the rest of the walls, the same friend suggested a grey so soft that it reads as white. White-stained white oak engineered floors and strategic lighting also served to brighten and visually enlarge the space.

The west-facing wall of windows seems to extend the living space, says the designer. In the evening, the setting sun illuminates the rooms. "At times the whole apartment is orange," he says.



The kitchen with grey-toned wood cabinets was one of the elements that sold Mr. Arcand on the unit. "It's like a piece of furniture."

Still, he reconfigured the lighting and replaced fixtures that provided a dim, blue light but didn't illuminate the space. "I actually removed some of the developer's upgrades. I've deleted the cool stuff."

He also added a quartz counter top and back splash.

The hulking island protruded into the living area and didn't add a lot of function. Mr. Arcand tore it out and replaced it with a long, shallow island that provides hiding spots for small appliances and drops at one end to serve as a side table for the living area.



The new island also provides a place to fold clean laundry. "This is my laundromat counter."

In another space-saving move, Mr. Arcand mounted the flat-screen television on an arm that swivels to face the living or the dining areas. When it's not in use, the screen fits in with the collage of artwork on the wall.

In the bedroom, Mr. Arcand displays his favourite work of art, which is an eight-foot long drawing by the artist John Monteith. The work is meant to be installed vertically, but Mr. Arcand sought the artist's approval to hang it horizontally. "That way I knew for a fact I wouldn't insult the artist."

The bathroom and laundry were well-designed, Mr. Arcand, says, so he only needed to refinish a vanity and add a storage unit.

"This is Cecconi Simone," he says. "Their planning is very good."

He recycled the handles from the old kitchen island by installing them on the storage tower.



Throughout the space, Mr. Arcand found solutions for hiding necessary-but-unattractive elements: The metal door on a breaker box in the hallway, for example, was hidden behind a removable panel.

He also removed sliding doors between rooms. Builders install them to save space, he says, but – paradoxically – he prefers hinged, solid-core doors for the added privacy.

Once he had reconfigured the space and pared down his furniture and belongings, Mr. Arcand found that he wanted to keep purging. “I got rid of 12 chairs – three sets of four.”

Now that he has had some time to live in his new home, Mr. Arcand says a second bedroom would be useful – and he misses having a front door that opens right to the sidewalk. Over all, though, he finds his new lifestyle rejuvenating. Indeed, he often leaves his work behind on a summer evening and heads out for a late-night swim.

“It’s kind of freeing.”