

The Perfect Solution

Human architecture marries the best of two schools of thought and both are improved in the blending

Author of the article:

Martha Uniacke Breen, [Special to National Post](#)

Publishing date:

Jul 28, 2018 • July 28, 2018 • 5 minute read



This beautiful space was originally part of a commercial project. PHOTO BY COURTESY OF ERIK ROTTER

There's long been something of a philosophical divide in architectural preference — particularly when it comes to residential design — between proponents of Modernism and those who prefer traditional style. The Modernists argue that the strict conventions and complex details of traditional design are restrictive and out of step with modern living; traditionalists counter that a connection with the past is what makes a house a home.

Toronto architect Gianpiero Pugliese, principal of the design firm Audax Inc., believes that both points of view are equally correct, and that actually, they're completely compatible. As part of a design philosophy he terms Human Architecture, Pugliese argues that optimum design for living today marries the best of both schools of thought, and that both are improved in the blending.

“Generally, at the start of Modernism with Corbusier and others, anything that smacked of traditional design was shunned; but in the process anything that may have been good about it was lost. In a sense, I think they may have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. A beautiful building is still a beautiful building, regardless of when it was built.

“Besides, certain methods and techniques haven't changed, like how you hang a door for example. There are reasons why some things were designed the way they are. And it's also about reverence for your ancestry, for the past. These things are important.”

The home that Pugliese created for his own family is a perfect example of how the concept creates a fresh perspective on both the familiar and the new. In this case, it starts right at the beginning, with its somewhat non-standard location: the main floor of a 1980s office building in Little Italy.

“My wife and I had just had our first baby, and we were living in a small condo at the time, so we went looking for a more permanent home,” he explains. “But location was very important to us, and the homes we looked at didn't really cut it. So, we decided to go with something different.



The child's bedroom has room for play. PHOTO BY COURTESY OF ERIK ROTTER

He happened to hear about a commercial project, which had a main floor available for sale. The vendor naturally assumed it would be purchased as office space, but after a bit of investigation, Pugliese discovered it was also zoned for residential.

“The idea seemed a little odd at first,” he laughs, “but the more we thought about it, the more we realized it was a perfect solution.”

One of the top attractors of the space — along with 10-foot ceilings, broad windows, and the fact that as an unfinished office space, it could be configured however his architectural imagination conceived — was its location, in the heart of a vibrant downtown neighborhood. Explains Pugliese, “I always make the calculation of quality of life: the value of having schools, banks, stores, markets and cafés, literally a stone’s throw from the front door, is huge.”



The master bedroom is classic and simple. PHOTO BY COURTESY OF ERIK ROTTER

A private elevator from street level (another perk of living in a converted commercial building) opens directly into a large, sun-filled space comprising kitchen, dining and living areas in classic open-plan formation. Past a small foyer whose floor is inlaid with black-and-white marble in a diamond pattern, most of the flooring in the suite is herringbone smoked oak strip, set off by straight-laid borders. Other ultra-traditional elements include tall, narrow three-panelled doors with brass hardware and crystal knobs.