



Creative Spaces: Colour, Gloss and Glam Emboldens a Toronto Victorian

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An editor and a writer with two young children turn a semi-detached late Victorian in downtown Toronto into a glamorous, boldly colored showplace, suffused with an eclectic, fun, artistic spirit.



By: *Rana Florida*, [Creative Class Group](#); [Special Contributor to HGTV.ca](#)

Who: **Gabe Gonda** is a Weekend Editor at the Globe and Mail, Canada's National newspaper, and **Victoria Webster** is a former sitcom writer who now spends her time taking care of their two children, writes a monthly column for Toronto Life and sits on the board of the Powerplant, Toronto's contemporary art gallery. The couple met in 2005 when they both happened to be living in the same building. After marrying they moved into a single unit but several months after their first son was born, they realized that they needed more space and bought their present home.

What: The late Victorian home is 4,500 square feet, complete with 10 ft ceilings. It was built in 1894 as two semi-detached homes for, it is believed, a father and his adult daughter, so unlike with most other semis, the layout of each side was completely distinctive. Joining the two spaces presented quite a challenge.



Where: Toronto's Rosedale neighbourhood, one of the city's oldest and most prestigious urban communities full heritage Victorian and Edwardian houses, old trees, and within walking distance to some of the best shops, restaurants and various other amenities.

Why: Because you wanted to see some colour!



Rana Florida: *What did you renovate? What did you keep? What did you change?*

Victoria Webster: When we first saw the house, almost every wall was painted an avocado green; the walls that weren't had this amazing decoupage, which we kept on the third floor. We loved the whole artistic vibe of the house (the previous owner was an artist) and wanted to keep that. Unfortunately, after we purchased the home and looked a little closer, we realized that it needed new wiring, new pipes, new floors...and that we were in for a big renovation. The main thing we did structurally was take out the back staircase, a remnant from when people lived much more formally. That gave us room for a large master bathroom and closet, as well as a butler's pantry off the kitchen.



RF: Who was your designer and architect and how did you select the team?

VW: The architect, [Wayne Swadron](#), was from a referral and we clicked right away. He was able to work with the space and restore the house rather than put his stamp all over it. We interviewed a few designers and even went a fair distance with a couple, but I never found that we were on the same page, design-wise. Then I opened up Elle Décor one day and saw a spread that encapsulated what I was trying to achieve. It was the work of [Philip Gorrivan](#) from New York. I called him the next day and he ended up agreeing to do the project. It posed some challenges, having him come from NY, especially in terms of shipping things to Canada, but his creativity and inspiration were indispensable, and it was well worth the trouble.

RF: What was the biggest challenge you encountered?

VW: We knew from my older siblings' experience that we were definitely going to need a mudroom once the kids got older. Our architect found a great way to do this – he had to move two stairwells, but it worked!

RF: Your home pops with color and you are clearly not afraid to take chances. How do you make it all come together so beautifully?

VW: While I am admittedly terrible at knowing how best to place furniture in a space, I do love colour. It has a real effect on my mood, and I draw inspiration from it. With colour, I can trust my instincts, and do what makes me happy. So far, it has worked out.



RF: *With two small children, how do you balance form with function?*

VW: I don't think I do...I am constantly yelling at the kids not to wipe their spaghetti sauce-covered faces on the velvet sofas! That's what fabric cleaners are for...



RF: *Where did most of your furniture come from? How did you direct the vision?*

VW: We had most of the furniture made, or sourced from vintage or antique stores, usually in LA, Miami and NY. My inspiration came from the work of designers Dorothy Draper and David Hicks, I find that they combine the glamour of bygone decades, with a “who the hell cares” mentality that I also wholly subscribe to. In the end, your home is for yourself; if you try to design to impress others, or worry about what they’ll think, you’ll never truly enjoy it and feel at home.



RF: *Tell us about your wallpaper choices.*

VW: The wallpaper is by the Brazilian-French artists' collective called AVAF, short for Assume Vivid Astro Focus. They do these wild installations where they completely transform a space and take the audience on a visual journey. I love their outlandishness; just having the paper up in the room is truly transportive. Sometimes I just sit in there and stare at it. The kids love it too.



RF: *What was the process to create those vibrant, glossy orange walls in the dining room?*

VW: Way longer and more intense than I bargained for! Twelve coats of paint that had to be completely hand sanded in between coats, until those hundred year old walls became as smooth as glass. Then three coats of gloss and a car buffer to shine them. It took my team of painters, (Elite Painting), about three weeks. I thought they were going to move in. It's amazing though. You can actually see your reflection in it. The colour is Benjamin Moore's Electric orange.



RF: *Which room is your favorite room?*

VW: It changes...



RF: *Your entertainment nook and bar create such a fun gathering spot. Please tell us about the disco shwarma!*

VW: It is so handy to have a bar when we are entertaining, and I love how it looks. A friend spotted the shwarma while we were together at the Toronto Art Fair and immediately pegged it as a “Victoria” piece. It is from a young artist from Marseilles called Boris Chouvalier and was at the York U booth. I love how inventive it is and how it combines a couple of my favourite things: dancing and going out to eat afterwards!

