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Creative Spaces: Kate & David Daniels and Their Art Deco Home: Part II

The Daniels' spectacular collection of art, furniture and light fixtures fills a home that is just as spectacular in form. As sophisticated as it is green and sustainable -- think kitchen floors made largely of crushed walnut shells -- the home's ingenious design and the way it mingles with the owners' decor choices points to the Daniels' central lifestyle criterion: emotion. To make everyday detail as evocative as can be.

Part II: Art, Light and Chairs -- So Many Chairs!

Who: **David Daniels** is a principal in real estate investment company, Daniels Capital Group, as well as [sustainable.TO](#), a “green” architecture & building firm. David is also Executive Producer of [The Acting Up Musical Theatre Company](#) and the [Glenn Gould Lectures](#), and is involved in TV, film and theatre projects with various partners in Canada and the US.



Main staircase: custom chandelier of vintage lamp shade frames, stretched with vintage linen by JamesPlumb (England).

Kate Daniels is a principal of [Daniels/Stephenson](#), a public relations and production company. Kate is also a board member of the Canadian Film Centre and the Governor General Awards Foundation. Most notably, Kate is super-mom to her and David's two children, aged five and seven! Both Kate and David are involved in a number of philanthropic projects around health, culture and education, which is a whole other (several) conversation...

Paul Dowsett is an [Architect and principal at sustainable.TO](#). Since graduating with distinction from the University of Waterloo School of Architecture, in over two decades of local and international environmentally-sensitive residential, commercial and institutional architectural practice, Paul has encountered so many clients confused by green-information overload that he has started sustainable.TO /architecture + building, to assist others make sense of it all, and add "green" and practical value to his clients' properties. Paul was principal architect on the "reimagining" of Daniels' home.



Front hall, left: wooden chairs by Donald Judd (USA); photograph by Miklos Gaal (Finland); Dog Lamp by James Plumb (UK). Right: glass chairs by Tobias Wong (Canada/US) in homage to Donald Judd; painting by Ulf Puder (Germany); bicycle sculpture by Jarbas Lopes (Brazil).

What: Originally designed as a single family home by Mackenzie Waters and was awarded the only Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Award in 1935. Of note: the renovation won another RAIC award 75 years later, this time for sustainable design! The home is described as a composition of plain masses. It's a rare example of domestic exterior art deco architecture in Toronto. As Tim Morawetz, author of *Art Deco*

Architecture in Toronto, notes, "1920s and '30s homes rarely featured Art Deco styling on the exterior for the reason of not wishing to appear too modern, showy or not fitting into the neighbourhood."

The landmark piece of Toronto's Art Deco heritage was sensitively transformed into a singular achievement of contemporary living, combining original details and materials with green, sustainable building and architectural practices.



The front hallway: artwork by Eldon Garnet (Canada); chairs by Laslo Kozma (Hungary).

Where: The premier neighbourhood of South Hill in Toronto.

Rana Florida: What was the overall design sensibility?

David Daniels: Our design sense is clean and ordered, intentionally upset by gestures of the unexpected. Decorative elements are present but minimal, with a mix of high and low finishes and furnishings, recycling and reusing whenever possible.



Dining Room Detail: chairs by Marcel Kammerer (Austria) and artwork by Ross Bleckner (USA)



Living room detail: Red Blue Chair by Gerrit Rietveld (Holland); standing lamp by Greta Grossman (USA).

RF: *You have an amazing chair collection. Can you tell us about these unique pieces?*

DD: I began collecting chairs and lamps casually 30 years ago; Kate and I have been serious collectors for about a decade. They are sculptures to me, plain and simple. Our tastes run the gamut, although I tend to focus on 1900-1950. Those pieces have the feeling of craft about them; touched by a human hand. We tend to shy away from synthetics and plastics, but have no hard and fast rules, except to stay away from knock-offs. We travel the world on the internet to search and research. Although we have bought pieces unseen from Europe and Scandinavia, we try to see the pieces “in vivo” whenever possible. Kate has had a say in much of the collection. She has an excellent eye and is a very quick study. The collection reflects both our tastes.



Vintage Chairs from left to right: Early Bentwood Chair by Michael Thonet (Germany) circa 1905, Shell Chair by Hans Wegner (Denmark) 1948, Puzzle Chair #1 by David Kawecki (USA) 1991, Captain's Chair by George Nakashima (USA) 1964 and Armchair by Otto Wagner (Germany) 1906.



Roller Cane chair by Paul Tuttle (USA) circa 1970s, lamp by Motte (France) and Lamino Chair by Yngve Ekstrom (Sweden) circa 1956.



Master bath: artwork by John Massey (Canada); 1930s chair by unknown (England).

RF: *Your lighting collection is also quite formidable. Can you tell us how you find such chandeliers?*

DD: Our lighting comes from all the same resources as the furniture, although we try to buy in North America so I don't have to rewire! The chandelier, designed especially for the main staircase, is by young English designers James Plumb, who works with reclaimed and repurposed materials. The shades are made from antique linens on old lamp forms.



Dressing room: vintage mirror table (South America), vintage pendant lamp (unknown); framed print by Leonard Cohen (Canada).



Details: Chair by Roland Rainer (Austria); WWII US Army issue campaign table that collapses into a box for travel! Early Fortuny floor lamp; two vintage table lamps by Christian Dell (France).

RF: *Finally, about the Art... What do you look for when collecting?*

DD: The same holds true for art: no hard and fast rules. Although the world of drawing, painting and sculpture is far more complex than furniture. We gravitate to work that displays painstaking technique rather than merely cleverness and intellect. The best work is a combination of all three, plus if it makes my heart skip a beat, or takes my breath away, then there's emotion at work too...and that's the vital criterion.



Detail: Watercolour series by David Bolduc (Canada); console table by Ernst Schwadron (Austria).



Side stairs; on the wall, vintage sign letters.

RF: *What is your favorite room in the house?*

DD: The kitchen may be my favorite room. Bad kitchen design is a *bete noire* for me. I personally worked on every detail of the design, allowing for the most practical and ergonomic experience possible. Everything from the height of the stainless steel counters, the dimensions of the drawers and cabinets, to the work flow in and around the room has been scrutinized. Of course, it helps that Kate is a masterful cook and knows exactly what she wants and needs. If the response from chefs both professional and amateur who have cooked here is any indication, it is a success.



Kitchen: designing the kitchen, David drew inspiration from painter, Paul Klee.



Kitchen: dining set by Hans Wegner (Denmark). Above table 1950s pendant lamps by FontanaArte with faceted glass lenses. Far right: Precedent Armchairs by Edward Wormley (USA) 1947.

DD: The kitchen floor fools everybody. Concrete? No, terrazzo? Both wrong. It is too pliant underfoot to be either. It is recycled, crushed walnut shells in a pourable water-based slurry. Once hardened it is sanded and sealed. Delicious!



Kitchen lounge area: Sofa and chairs by Gunilla Allard (Sweden). Frozen Food photograph by Irving Penn (USA) circa 1977.



Pool house: *sofa and chairs, Canadian Tire!*

RF: *What's next for you?*

DD: My next personal project is to design a brand new home to passive house standards here in the city.

[The Daniels, Part I](#)

