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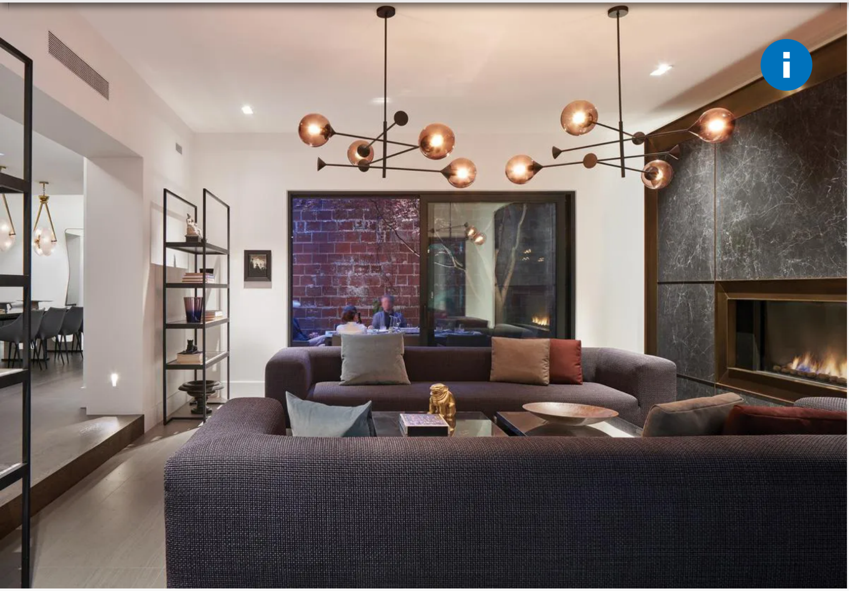

HOMES

A secret laneway home in central Toronto glows with natural light

A rebuild makes the most of large skylights and glass-door walkouts to twin courtyards that flood Annex Coach House with daylight

By **Georgie Binks** Special to the Star
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“When you walk in, it’s like walking into another world,” says Toronto architect Michael Taylor of the hidden-from-view Annex Coach House.

The home, originally Moore’s Hearse Livery, was converted to a residence in the 1980s. It had been renovated and expanded over the years — just two brick walls in the two open-air courtyards remain from the original vehicle depot building.

In need of a modern update, the 3,200-sq.-ft. interior was stripped back to its studs and rebuilt with contemporary lines and materials that include wood, stone, bronze and leather.

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Secreted away in Toronto’s central Annex neighbourhood, down a lane and behind another house, the unusual residence is a surprise inside with its maximized use of bright, natural light. On the first floor, the living room and dining room each have large skylights. The two courtyards open to the living room and both sides of the den with sliding glass doors.

In the den, a fireplace is set into a striking wall of dark-veined porcelain and trimmed in bronze. “One of the most dramatic components is, when you walk in the front door, you see all the way through to the den and this dramatic fireplace,” says

Taylor.

The partial upper level leads out to a rooftop deck that features different seating areas, a hot tub and lush landscaping. On the same level inside are two bedrooms and two bathrooms concealed from the roof deck by a custom wood-slat screen.

Annex Coach House took to 2-1/2 years to design and rebuild, and was completed in 2020.

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Architect Michael Taylor, principal at Taylor Smyth Architects, and William Fulghum of William Fulghum Design Associates answer a few questions about Annex Coach House:

What was the inspiration for the remake of this private and unusual

home?

William: The clients came from a very formal house in north Toronto, and wanted something more urban and contemporary. It’s a remarkable property because the walls are very old. It created a beautiful contrast to what they wanted to do with the interior.

Two interior courtyards drew the client to the property. We kept the walls but opened everything up. We were trying to add a bit of romance and sensuality to the space in our material choices.

How did you design the home to draw in the most natural light?

Michael: The two skylights were a fantastic opportunity to really bring light right into the centre of the house at the ground floor. Then, the openings into the gardens were replaced with sliding glass doors. There are sliding glass doors from the dining room into one courtyard, the living room into the other and from the den which is between the courtyards — they have sliding glass doors at each end so you can look into each courtyard from the den.

When you came up the stairs and outside on the second floor, it wasn't especially pretty. So, we created a wood screen that reflects something I've always been interested in — the play between solid and void, texture and the way sunlight changed the look of space and the outside of a building, according to the time of day.

The screen is actually made out of vertical wood ends that are different lengths and depths. There's a sort of dance that's playful and quite engaging.

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What were the biggest challenges in the redesign and rebuild?

Michael: From a technical point of view, the existing house and structure were in really bad shape. There were actually vines growing through the walls into the space which we discovered when we started to strip away the drywall. The structure was quite broken up.

We also had to reinforce the ceiling of the living room/dining room because of the additional load we were creating for the rooftop terrace.

William: For me, the challenge was marrying the materials and keeping the sense of flow from one room to the next. There was a sensuality to it yet I was worried things would start to feel heavy. When you're working with marble and heavy floor tiles it can start to feel monumental, and I wanted it to feel loft-like.

Georgie Binks is a Toronto-based writer and a freelance contributor for the Star. Reach her at *binksgeorgie@gmail.com*

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