



NOW: Left, the family's kitchen was updated with a white quartz island and white finish on cabinetry to work with new white oak flooring.



KEVIN HUANG

THEN: Dark cabinetry, above, made the original kitchen feel dated and a bit gloomy.

RENÉ JOHNSTON TORONTO STAR

Spaces reconfigured into clearly defined zones

CONDO from H1

"I could see that it could be converted into three bedrooms and that it was sizable enough that it would accommodate our lifestyle. It's definitely not as big as the house, but it's livable and family-friendly," Huang said.

With no third bedroom, an awkward master bedroom design, worn hardwood flooring and heavy carpets, the condo needed to be renovated before they moved in.

Isabella has serious environmental and food allergies that require a hypoallergenic living space with no drapes or rugs, and separate dishes and cooking implements.

Huang reached out to Andrea Gray, owner of Andrea Gray Design, to help bring his vision to life. "The bones of the condo were good. It was the finishes that were very old-fashioned," she said.

When it came to reconfiguring for the family's needs, Huang zeroed in on an open area off the kitchen as a potential third bedroom. Pocket doors and built-in shelving around the existing fireplace create a private sanctuary for Isabella. With the addition of desks and built-in book cases, a basic hallway outside the room blossomed into the girls' study area.

"The biggest thing we did was define the open spaces," Gray said.

"We wanted to make it modern and take full advantage of the openness of the living area, but functional so there's a clear flow and definition of zones."

The living room and dining room are separated with dramatic light fixtures from Royal Lighting and Gray commissioned a custom entertainment unit that anchors the TV-watching and relaxing area.

"It's definitely not as big as the house, but it's livable and family-friendly."

KEVIN HUANG,
HOMEOWNER

New pot lights line the perimeter of the room and were also added to the bedrooms.

"The lighting before was OK, but my wife is used to bright lights in our old house. She needs to be able to read everywhere," Huang said.

When it came to decor, they started by sourcing a white oak floor from Spain at Stone Tile, which served as inspiration for every other design decision in the home, from the light grey wall colour to the white quartz island to the complementary blue art pieces.

"Everytime we met to pick out finishings, Andrea would be

carrying the floor sample to make sure everything would match," Huang said.

The kitchen had plenty of cabinetry but the dark wood felt gloomy, so they had cabinets resurfaced and repainted an off-white by Cabinet, which also did all the built-ins and finishes, including a custom-built console table.

Huang didn't like the flow of the master bedroom, which plunked a large closet in the centre of the room.

A reconfiguration provided easier access to the ensuite and more space for precious storage.

This was important because transitioning their belongings from a large house to a condo proved to be the biggest challenge.

The girls' collection of books could fill a room — Huang estimates they have 350 in the condo and another 700 in their

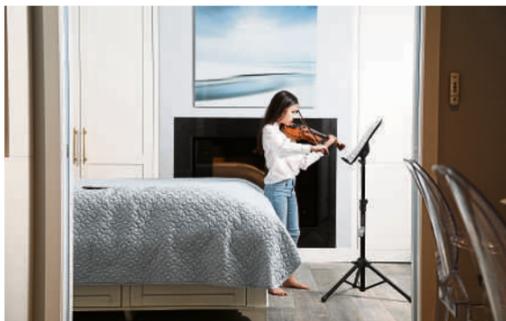
rented storage unit.

Chen worked with house coach Anja Lavigne to help organize and release the things that wouldn't fit into the condo.

"It was very difficult for me to let go of things because everything has meaning. But Anja talked me through whether I really needed something and taught me to categorize and organize in a smaller space," Chen said.

The family was pleasantly surprised by the relatively smooth construction process, especially considering the scope of the renovation — and in a residence that shares space with a hotel with strict specifications. Huang credits the expedience to general contractor Flavio Di Benedetto.

"I was pleased that we were able to stay on time and on budget, despite the coordination required with building management," Huang said.



RENÉ JOHNSTON TORONTO STAR

NOW: Emilia, 8, practises in a new bedroom created from the condo's former dining area.



KEVIN HUANG

THEN: The dining area before it was transformed into a third bedroom.



RENÉ JOHNSTON TORONTO STAR

NOW: A study area bloomed from a basic hallway with the addition of desks and built-in bookcases.

> THE WOW FACTOR

Decorative timber staircase is at the centre of Corkscrew House

The innovative residence offers an airy, light-filled home for three in Berlin

GEORGIE BINKS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Corkscrew House would seem to get its name from the innovative staircase spiralling through storeys of the home in Berlin, Germany.

But it's actually the cork used throughout the abode that prompted the quirky moniker.

German architects Rundzwei Architekten designed the innovative residence within strict planning regulations to create a home for three that offers comfort, sustainability and beauty.

On the lowest floor of the 3,444-square-foot home, a bedroom and bathroom open out onto a sunken pool. The next floor contains a multi-levelled living space with kitchen, dining and living areas.

Above that, there are three bedrooms and bathrooms, a study and library.

An eclectic timber staircase, with white steel rods and illuminated from above by a star-shaped skylight, joins the various levels.

Other building materials include in-situ concrete, rammed concrete walls and timber. Rammed concrete and timber walls are clad with fibre gypsum boards made from recycled paper, gypsum and water, and

painted with a silicate paint. No chemical adhesives or construction foam were used; the architects opted for wood fibre and cellulose insulation materials, in addition to insulating cork panels. A stratified heat storage system, supplemented by roof-integrated solar panels, provides most of the home's heating.

The home cost approximately \$1.5 million and was completed last year after two years in design and construction.

We asked Andreas Reeg, with Rundzwei Architekten, a few questions about the building.

What was your inspiration for the design?

It wasn't as much inspiration as more a creative reaction to very strict regulations for the site. Planning authorities gave strict height limits on the eaves line and ridge, and the overall footprint of a new building. This resulted in a roughly 32-by-32-foot footprint.

At the same time, planning conditions only allowed for roughly 377 square feet gross floor area on the site. Due to a special regulation that considers a lower floor not usable area if it doesn't stick out more than 4.6 feet on average, we developed the stepped surfaces from the basement up to the roof.

This makes all levels below the ground floor as per this definition basement ... through this trick we managed to gener-

ate roughly 1,049 square feet gross floor area.

What were the advantages to using the cork material?

Cork is a wonderful material. Its bark is peeled every seven to nine years and is the only tree that regrows its bark. The first peeling is used for the facade cork. The bark is milled into granulate, which is then formed into large blocks through heat and pressure.

The cork resin is released through the heat while the pressure and the resin glue the granulate together. Because of its natural build-up of millions of air encapsulation cells, it's a perfect insulation material. At the same time, it's mould and weather-resistant. It's also permeable which makes it even more perfect to clad timber structures and can be formed into any shape with all standard woodwork tools.

Explain the design of the staircase?

We wanted a central stair capable of accessing multiple levels while remaining open to visually connect the lower living levels with the work and library levels underneath the roof.

The staircase is made out of laminated timber elements held together by the white steel rods.

By varying the step widths, we realized a sculptural stair that can also be used to place decorative objects and plants.



GUI REBELO RUNDZWEI ARCHITEKTE

Architect Andreas Reeg says the home's design was a creative reaction to very strict regulations for the building site.