

# Taken by Surprise

*What began as a simple kitchen expansion soon grew into a full-fledged adventure, turning a Georgian house in Toronto into a setting of unexpected delights*

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With its deep taupe walls, Adam-style armchairs, and 18th-century Swedish crystal chandelier, the dining room is elegantly appointed, as befits its purpose. The room is the setting for numerous formal dinners hosted by its owners, Maxine Granovsky Gluskin, president of the Art Gallery of Ontario's board of trustees, and her husband, Ira Gluskin, who works in finance.

But take another glance at the well-dressed space, and the plot thickens. There is drama in the orange silk curtains, not to mention the rhinestone-studded Mickalene Thomas canvas of a woman in a provocative pose. Meanwhile, is it possible that the eyes are crossed in the antique portraits on either side of the mantel? And did the wall to the left of the fireplace just swing open—table, artwork, and all? The answer to both questions is *absolutely*. “The portraits are by Hans-Peter Feldmann, an artist who buys old paintings at flea markets and then manipulates them,” says Maxine. “And that’s a jib door. I had seen one at Buckingham Palace [the Queen uses it to go from her private quarters into the public drawing room] and thought it would be fun to have one here.”

Surprises like these abound at the Gluskin residence, where decorous good taste meets whimsy and cutting-edge art. The Toronto couple moved into the 1920s Georgian Revival in Forest Hill, a prosperous residential neighborhood near the city’s downtown, in 1994. It was a second marriage for both. “I looked at a lot of houses, and then I walked through the front door of this one,” Maxine says. “It was a summer’s day, and the back doors were open, birds were singing, and the light was streaming in. The vibe was so fantastic.”

They held their wedding in a tent in the garden and raised their children in the house. During that time, she became involved with the museum and found that her taste, which had always leaned traditional, was evolving. She began to collect contemporary art and photography. “I decided to focus on portraiture, because imposing a discipline made it more interesting,” she says. “We joined a traveling group through the museum and began visiting artists’ studios and meeting collectors and curators.”

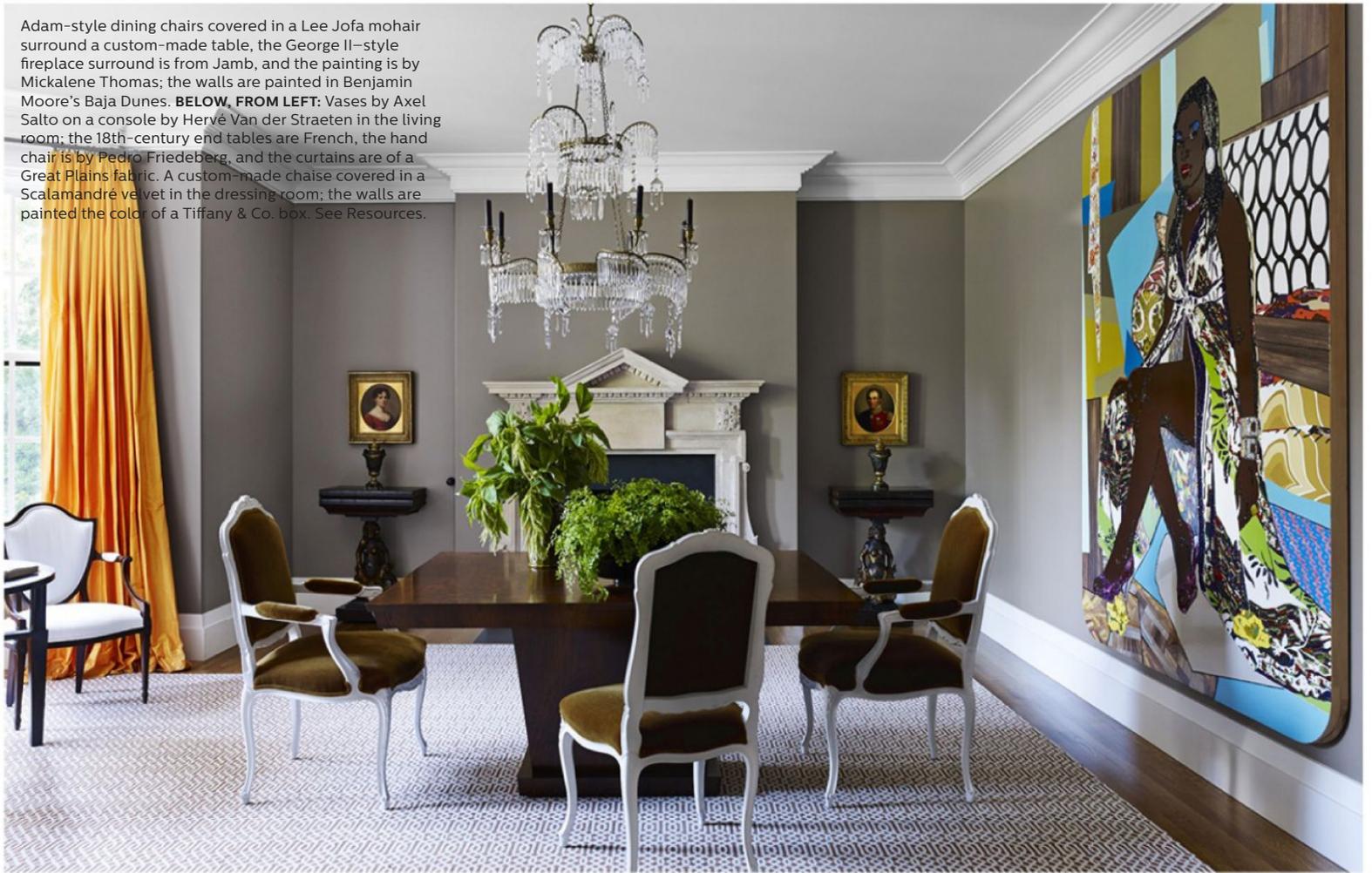
Fourteen years later, she decided to renovate and expand the kitchen. Her team included the interior designer Candace Shaw and a local architect,

**LEFT:** The living room of Maxine Granovsky Gluskin and Ira Gluskin's Toronto home, which was renovated by architect Shawn Freeman and decorated by Candace Shaw. The wing-back chair by Tom Dixon is upholstered in a Great Plains velvet; Vladimir Kagan chairs, covered in a Rose Cumming fabric, flank a 1970s cocktail table by Philip and Kelvin LaVerne; the sofa and armchair, upholstered in a silk velvet by Nancy Corzine, are custom designs, the painting is by Alex Katz, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Mountainscape. See Resources.

In the husband's study, the Vladimir Kagan armchairs and pendant fixture by Chris Lehrecke are from Ralph Pucci, the 1930s walnut table is Italian, and the custom carpet is by Kelly Wearstler.



Adam-style dining chairs covered in a Lee Jofa mohair surround a custom-made table, the George II-style fireplace surround is from Jamb, and the painting is by Mickalene Thomas; the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore's Baja Dunes. **BELOW, FROM LEFT:** Vases by Axel Salto on a console by Hervé Van der Straeten in the living room; the 18th-century end tables are French, the hand chair is by Pedro Friedeberg, and the curtains are of a Great Plains fabric. A custom-made chaise covered in a Scalamandré velvet in the dressing room; the walls are painted the color of a Tiffany & Co. box. See Resources.





The garden pavilion holds armchairs by Poltrona Frau, a 1960s side table by Paul Evans, a sofa by Paola Lenti, and stools by Ligne Roset. **ABOVE, FROM LEFT:** A painting by George Condo, an Adam-style armchair, and a sculpture by Thomas Houseago in the main hall. An antique mahogany desk is paired with a chair by Frances Elkins in the breakfast room; the sofa is a custom design, and the green 1950s chair is by Folke Jansson for Fritz Hansen. See Resources.

In the library, the sofa, upholstered in a Scalaman-dré velvet, tufted side chair, and cocktail table are all custom designs, and the circa-1960 armchairs by Batinin Spade, originally designed for the ocean liner *SS France*, are covered in a Loro Piana wool; the photograph is by Alec Soth, the light fixture by artist Deborah Thomas was found at Sotheby's, the walls are paneled in cherry, the carpet is wool, and the curtains are of a silk by Pollack. See Resources.







Shawn Freeman. The renovation quickly snowballed. Soon, the entire house was being gutted, and the Gluskins temporarily moved out. “It was a little like an *I Love Lucy* episode, where she might buy a new hat and then decide she needs a whole new outfit to go with it,” Maxine says.

At a moment when many old-house owners are ripping out the servants’ quarters in favor of an open plan, the Toronto couple moved in the opposite direction. The house was redesigned and given an upstairs-downstairs layout, complete with a new service entrance, back stairs, and a laundry room with a full-size mangle for ironing bed linens and tablecloths. “I had worked with her before, so I saw how the place was not functioning,” Candace Shaw says. “This is a very formal house. The vision was to separate the family rooms from a background network of spaces.”

Freeman designed an addition that increased the size of the house by half, to 15,000 square feet. On the exterior, he meticulously matched the original Indiana limestone and stucco for the home’s new section. Inside, no surface was left untouched. Many of the architectural details—from a Chippendale-style fretwork stair rail to the

classical moldings in the hallway—were inspired by the historic houses that Maxine loves to visit in Europe. “Making doors disappear was part of the challenge,” Freeman says. “Maxine is an art collector, so she needs wall space.”

The living room, with its white-painted grass cloth walls and chocolate and cream upholstery, was a departure for Maxine, who usually gravitates toward colorful interiors. But there was still plenty of opportunity to play with vivid hues. The master bedroom has lavender walls and turquoise curtains, and the dressing room is Tiffany blue. In almost every room, the art—from the Thomas Houseago sculpture of a hulking man in the main hall to Alec Soth’s photograph of a bride in the paneled library—provides the focal point.

The renovation was so extensive, it ended up taking four years. Even so, Maxine enjoyed the process so much that she was almost wistful when it was over. So she took a cue from Lucille Ball and commissioned one last fabulous accessory for the house: a modernist garden pavilion with retractable glass walls. “We have dinner, then go through the jib door and into the garden,” she says. “It’s my version of a summer house.” ■

**ABOVE:** The bed in the master bedroom is composed of antique wood columns with a headboard upholstered in a Clarence House linen; the painting is by Chantal Joffe, and the walls are painted in Benjamin Moore’s Spring Iris. **FACING PAGE:** A dining table and chairs by Richard Schultz for Knoll in the garden. See Resources.