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IT TAKES TWO

*First they were friends,
then design partners*

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FIRST FRIENDS, THEN PARTNERS

Design team's synergy propels a personal project

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DESIGN
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Isabelle Perez and Grant Kefalas are principals
in the firm Evolution Design.

*“It’s one thing to design homes for clients.
It’s another to design for your own family.”*

Furniture and fabric from different eras co-habit comfortably with the designers in the living room. (Opposite and below) Drapes are Italian and hand painted, made by Zoffany and purchased at the wallcovering and fabric store Crescendo. The custom fireplace mantel is African mahogany, bleached a taupe colour. The coffee table is from high-end furniture supplier Celadon. Attention to detail is evident in a pair of fuchsia wooden benches, created by Isabelle’s company, Evolution Design. They were treated by Ébénisterie Pellegrino to look like brushed aluminum. Accessories are from Waylande Gregory Studios and supplied by Evolution Design.



GRANT KEFALAS AND ISABELLE PEREZ of Evolution Design began their partnership in 2006 by working with a very particular client – Isabelle Perez herself.


The two had known each other for years through family and friends. She was a newly minted designer working on her own, and he was a long-time designer whose work she had admired. She was wondering if he could help on her personal project, one that would involve someone with his architectural knowledge.

“It’s one thing to design homes for clients. It’s another to design for your own family. I needed a sounding board, so I asked Grant to collaborate with me.”

Their project would involve something that had been nagging at the designer ever since she and her husband Ariel and their two children moved into their home in 2002. The original layout of her 6,000-square-foot French country-style stone house in St. Laurent posed a few problems.

“We were always stuck in the dinette and a small family room that lacked charm. We’re a big extended family and there’s always someone here. There just wasn’t enough space.”

Isabelle and Grant began to work together on the extension. The structure housing that family room with the lack of charm was torn away and an addition was built, with a second floor above it to enlarge the fourth bedroom and provide it with an ensuite.

That had not come easy, recalled Grant. “The challenge was to integrate the architecture with what we wanted.” The wish list included a family dining area, bay window, larger kitchen and inviting family room. 

“The challenge was to integrate the architecture with what we wanted.”

The kitchen has been opened up for the constant stream of family and friends. The centre island was designed to look like a piece of fine furniture, while still getting the job done. Kids do homework at the kitchen table. The table and chairs are from Fraser Furniture, island stools from Evolution Design, and custom cabinetry executed by Paolo Design.



“This house is all about the details.”

(Left) The home office has been softened with accent chairs. That chair, the desk and desk lamp are all from Fraser Furniture, while fabrics are from Crescendo and the office orchid arrangement from Celadon. (Right) The winding staircase off the hallway was part of the original construction of the home.

Adding to the difficulty, or perhaps the hilarity, was the fact that Isabelle had been carrying her third child throughout the work. “I was a pregnant woman on a work site!”

While renovations regularly experience long delays, her delivery did not come with that luxury. She would have to bring her new son home to her parents’ place, as her renovation had not yet been completed. “Meanwhile, my husband was living with all the construction.”

As her renovation drew to a close, the working relationship between Isabelle and Grant grew stronger. Their friendship had turned into a business partnership, and during that year of her renovation they began to take on new clients.

It’s a beautiful synergy, they say. “When we both agree about something, we go ahead with it,” said Grant.

In the years since, the two have taken on many clients who have experienced what she

did and have seen their homes torn asunder. “We do everything from renovation to interior design,” said Isabelle, who names the upcoming Le 215 Redfern in Westmount as one of their design firm’s more prestigious projects.

Isabelle says she and Grant work with a mutual respect for each other, and they love that they are both detail-oriented, something that Grant sees in Isabelle’s home: “This house is all about the details.”



From sofas to what seem like acres of paneling and moulding, everything is custom-made, or reimagined to suit the owner's taste. Case in point: the living room side tables. "They are originally from Frasers. We loved the shape but were unhappy with the finish. It wasn't sophisticated enough." So it was off to Ébénisterie Pellegrino to be refinished with a piano lacquer body and a crackled top that resembles hide without an animal having to give one up.

The partners' first project together is today a home of restrained sophistication, subtle glamour and real practicality for a growing family. "The whole house is used. There is no dead space," said Isabelle. "The kids do their homework in the kitchen and watch tv where I can keep an eye on them. I always felt that I was left to my own devices in the kitchen. Now it's open to the entire family."

On a recent visit, there were gardeners in the garden and, entering the home, there was kids' gear by the front door. Stepping in farther, an enormous ceiling greets you overhead with a winding staircase to the second floor. The formal living room possesses a fireplace and a wall of windows. Framing these windows is one of Isabelle's favourite items: hand-printed Italian side panels of vivid, nature-inspired linen, designed by Zoffany.

And then there's the living room's little fuchsia cube benches, designed by Evolution Design and built by the craftsmen at Pellegrino in wood but finished to look like brushed aluminum.

And something else: a double mantel over the fireplace. It was once African mahogany. The designers loved the grain but couldn't abide the colour. So they bleached it a taupe colour, like driftwood.

Ahh, those small details, always important to the two people whose founding project was built on them. 🐾

Upstairs, the bedrooms and master bath offer sanctuary and repose after a long day. (Opposite) The master bed headboard is custom made by Evolution Design, as are the decorative pillows. The bedding hails from Yves Delorme and the carpet is from Indiport.

