



Avedissian's Ambition



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIGITTE BOUVIER

Houry Avedissian does it all, from architecture to interior design. But to reach her career ambitions, the rising star had to overcome some serious obstacles

By Janet Wilson

Houry Avedissian is running late. Heads turn as she rushes into a busy Westboro coffee shop dressed in a chic, form-fitting dress and leaving a trail of Obsession perfume in her wake. Brimming with confidence and charm, the one-woman show of Haz Architecture Design thrives on being pulled in a dozen directions.

As we order our cappuccinos on a recent afternoon, a new client, who lives in an apartment a few floors above where we sit, stops by to inspect the drawings Avedissian has just completed of two

semi-detached homes on a nearby lot.

"I like to have two to three projects on the go at the same time. I do it all — interior design, tear-downs and rebuilds, renovations, additions and creating new homes." She even takes her own high-quality photographs of her projects.

The 38-year-old enjoys juggling the many facets of her work. A typical day may consist of meetings with contractors, a variety of different sub-trades, searching for new clients and investors and reaching out to real estate agents in hopes of finding potential lots. Since she went out on her own, she's built three homes and has carried out three renovations, with more projects in the works.

She has worked for several firms designing commercial real estate, but her passion is creating unique custom residential projects and marrying architecture with interior design.

Wood, glass and metal feature prominently in her work, which has a decidedly modern esthetic with varied rooflines, floating staircases and oversized windows that bring the outside in. She took

took on her first project in Ottawa in 2008, but she only moved to the capital from Montreal in April 2011. Most of her work is focused in the Westboro area, including an inspiring home that resembles a treehouse, which was featured in Style's summer issue.

"My goal is to break new ground in Ottawa. I want to bring things here that I've seen around the world and do it in smaller-scale projects and more economically."

Don Robertson, who hired Avedissian to do drawings for a new home in Orléans, applauds the passion she brings to her work.

"She was on site all the time. Everything she suggested, we did. She's going to go far," Robertson says.

Avedissian is enjoying her new adopted city but she laments the fact that its design is "too passive. That is the reality," she says.

She begins each day with a cappuccino before checking email from clients and Facebook messages from friends and family. Avedissian, whose parents were originally from Armenia, was born in Australia, but raised in Montreal—a city she >>



Houry Avedissian overcame partial paralysis while chasing her dream. Now, at 38, she's living it. This project, where a bungalow once stood, is on Prestone Drive in Orléans.

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returns to twice a month to visit her mother and extended family.

An only child, Avedissian says she knew at the age of nine that she wanted to be an architect.

"I kept myself busy by building doll houses. It was an ongoing project as I was always adding on rooms. I liked to make and build things."

Avedissian's dream was almost cut short 17 years ago after she collapsed while sitting in class in her first year of architectural studies at the Université de Montréal. She suffered an arteriovenous malformation (AVM) in her brain and spent months in recovery after losing the mobility on the right side of her body.

"I thought my dream of becoming an architect was over, as you need your hands to draw," she says. "A year later, I signed up for business courses at Concordia University, but only went for one day."

Avedissian's former architecture professor tracked her down and insisted that she return, offering to teach her how to use a computer instead of a pencil to design drawings. Over the years, she has taught herself how to write using her left hand and any side-effects are long since gone.

"I'm doing exactly what I've wanted to do since I was a little girl. I feel lucky that I get to carry out living my dream."



This large residence in Beacon Hill had an unusually small kitchen. Avedissian undertook a renovation that saw the old kitchen's space reduced to a walk-in pantry.

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