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JAPANESE TAKE ON ART DECO

Rare vase has era's classic features **G6**



GET A HANDLE ON DOORS

Performance is
key: Holmes **G4**

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SECTION G



Houry Avedissian of Ha2 Architectural Design won kudos at the Housing Design Awards for her Royal Twins semi-detached project in Westboro Beach. WAYNE CUDDINGTON/OTTAWA CITIZEN

Architectural designer Houry Avedissian is heating up the Ottawa housing scene, winning four awards in just her second try, *Patrick Langston* writes.

When Houry Avedissian starts talking about residential architecture, hang on to your hat. The owner of Ha2 Architectural Design (ha2d.com) lives and breathes her career, and when she exclaims, "I'm married to my job!" you instinctively look for the wedding band.

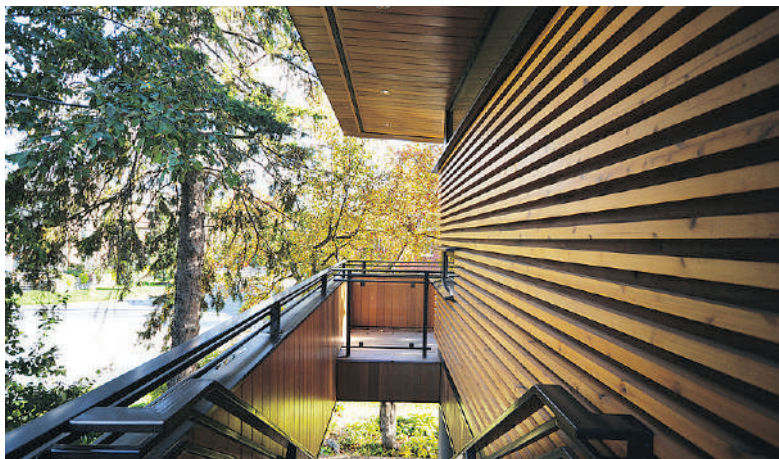
She doesn't actually wear one, but over a coffee recently (engrossed in her subject, she never finished drinking it), Avedissian did talk about her work with a passion and commitment that many a weary office drone would envy.

A four-time winner at the 2015 Ottawa Housing Design Awards — the first time she's won there — the 41-year-old architectural designer has worked in both Ottawa and Montreal, with Ottawa her focus over the past several years. Her Royal Twins project, a semi-detached infill in Westboro, took two of her recent four awards, and Avedissian's fervour for the undertaking hasn't diminished an iota.

Built so the main living area captures the "beautiful afternoon light," the front elevation of each unit features overhang balconies clad in western red cedar set against stark white cement board panelling. "It's a sculptural effect of shifting planes that I carved out instead of just putting canopies to protect you against the sun and weather," she says.

SEE PASSION ON **G2**

Passion for design



A custom fireplace spans the length of the living room in Avedissian's Royal Twins project. Set on a base of dark slate tile, it appears to float from one side to the other. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

LEFT: The guest entrance to her Treehouse project pairs a steel and concrete staircase with western red cedar to ground the space while still feeling like you're in the tree tops. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

Colour your world with white and other neutral tones



MARILYN WILSON
Condo Scene

According to Benjamin Moore, the colour of the year is Simply White. But don't let that fool you into thinking 2016 will be bland.

"White is a perfect way to define a space in a really beautiful and sophisticated way," says a video on the paint brand's website.

Sherwin-Williams has also chosen a shade of white, Alabaster, as its colour of the year.

"Alabaster represents a straightforward and necessary shift to mindfulness," Jackie Jordan, the company's director of colour marketing, says on the website.

Which brings us to infusing your space with neutrals for a clean look this year.

Neutrals are anything but boring.

If you need proof of that, check out Benjamin Moore's catalogue, where there are more than 250 shades of white. Take that, Fifty Shades of Grey.

INTRODUCING NEUTRALS

There is a huge emphasis today on behaving in ways that do not

negatively affect the environment. Recycling and being at one with nature are important for our survival and health. It makes sense then that in a high-stress and fast-paced world, the push to go back to basics and preserve the planet would be mirrored in home decor.

Window treatments, lighting elements and architectural details can all be chosen to accommodate this trend. In the kitchen, opt for neutral

cabinetry or white subway tiles for backsplashes. In addition to being easy to keep clean, this look freshens up an interior.

Magazines and showrooms often display all-white spaces, but the fear is that when incorporated in home interiors, this look might read as boring or lacking in personality. If this is your fear, consider warming up the space with other neutral tones — grey walls, for instance, or tans in sisal rugs or linen shades, both of which add an interesting sense of texture that will warm up the space.

SEE MARILYN ON **G6**

'Treehouse' still a favourite design

PASSION FROM G1

The Royal Twins is one of many new home and reno/addition projects to give her the electric charge she looks for in her work. "When you see what you designed in your head come to life, there's no better feeling. Except travelling the world, which I do as much as I can."

Armenian by heritage, Australian by birth, a Montrealer for most of her life, Avedissian blends a hip, outgoing cosmopolitanism with a flair for focusing, when the time is right, on what the other person is saying or asking. That combination of what both she and others bring to the conversation extends to her design ethos.

"It's an amalgamation of respecting what the (building) lot demands and what the client wants," she says. "A lot of people come in with a drawing or photo of what they want. I say, 'Let's put that aside and get to know you and what the lot wants. If I design something for you, maybe it will look like that drawing or it may not.'"

The lot was key in what's still one of her favourite designs: the Treehouse. Built on a thickly treed corner property in Westboro, the home replaced a tiny bungalow in which the client had lived for 20 years. The Treehouse, with its mix of wood and other materials inside and out, seems to float among the lush trees surrounding it, giving the home its name.

"It started as a reno, but then I saw the lot and had one of those Eureka! moments," says Avedissian. "I imagined (the client) living on top of the trees. It became a mission for me."

A finalist at the Housing Design Awards in 2014, the project recently won the Western Red Cedar Sponsorship Award at the Wood Design & Building Awards. Run by the Canadian Wood Council, the awards draw competitors from across North America and internationally. The Treehouse is also in the running at Montreal's Grands Prix du Design awards in February for Quebec architects and designers.

Avedissian, who's single with no plans to have children, set out on her architectural path early in life. As a nine-year-old, she saw a television show about architects. "I said, 'Wow! That's amazing! That's what I want to do.'"

She almost didn't. During her first year of architectural studies at the University of Montreal, she suffered a brain hemorrhage, the result of a blood vessel abnormality. She spent her 21st birthday in hospital and had to learn to use her left hand while she recovered from the incident.

"It slowed down my career a bit," she says. "But it made me who I am. It made me a fighter."

Asked if that fervid determination to succeed has met resistance in the male-dominated architectural/design field, she's momentarily bemused, as if she's never really thought about it. If there was resistance, she finally says, it dissipated when people saw the Treehouse.

Avedissian's other Ottawa projects range from award-winning renos of a condo and a 1960s Alta Vista home (the latter award was shared with RND Construction) to a sleek custom kitchen with a spectacular walnut veneer ceiling/wall/table treatment, part of a whole-home renovation and a finalist at last year's design awards.

In Montreal, where she owns a condo on the West Island, she worked on primarily commercial projects, including office towers, for several years following graduation. She says that unlike Ottawa, there's no "infill culture" in Montreal, in part because so many urban buildings have heritage protection or because grassroots committees in upscale areas like the Town of Mount Royal zealously guard the existing character of their neighbourhoods.

Avedissian also worked in the Turks and Caicos Islands from 2007 to 2008, learning the secrets of villa design.

Busy as she is in two cities, she admits that some aspects of her life wind up on the back burner. "I need to renovate my own condo but when am I going to do that? And where am I going to get the money?" she asks with a resigned sigh.

Then again, she wouldn't have things any other way. "When I'm on Facebook, I'm not looking at pictures of people's kids. I'm looking at pictures of homes."



The lot was key in what's still one of Houry Avedissian's favourite designs: the Treehouse. Built on a thickly treed corner property in Westboro, the home replaced a tiny bungalow and seems to float among the lush trees surrounding it, giving the home its name. JUSTIN VAN LEEUWEN



LEFT: A choppy semi-detached was gutted and redesigned to make room for an attractive 'island table' framed by a dropped ceiling that carried down onto the wall. When the tinted glass pendants are lit, the colours that splash on the white quartz table top tie in with the mosaic backsplash. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN



ABOVE: A linear fireplace clad in smooth white porcelain replaces an old grey stone one and lets the grand piano in the adjacent room command attention in this renovation project that turned an inefficient layout into an inviting space. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
LEFT: An older condo unit being taken over by a younger family member was revamped in this award-winning renovation. The space was opened up and a focal point was created with a custom walnut veneered high breakfast bar. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN



ABOVE: A 16-foot-wide sliding patio door that opens eight feet wide serves as a backdrop for the kitchen and dining room of the Royal Twins project. Cleverly laid out lighting fixtures can be rotated to reconfigure the otherwise casual dining/sitting area into one big formal dining room for special gatherings. COURTESY HA2 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
RIGHT: A pickled white western red cedar inner wall serves as a backdrop to the glass-enclosed staircase in the Treehouse's main living area. JUSTIN VAN LEEUWEN

