

"The kitchen is great for hosting year-round," says homeowner Neil Farlette. "In the summertime, we open the doors for drinks and dinners on the deck."

**DESIGN**, Project 22 Design, project22design.com; **ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN**, Environmental Design Group; custom **MILLWORK** (throughout), Alex Goldie Custom Furniture; Calm OC-22 **WALL PAINT** (throughout), Benjamin Moore.

# BUILDING A DREAM

Starting from the ground up, a Vancouver couple creates a modern dream home that's as family friendly as it is chic.

**TEXT** CHRISTY WRIGHT

**PHOTOGRAPHY** JANIS NICOLAY



The dining area is defined by a built-in walnut shelving unit that opens into the living room. The glossy white Tulip-style dining table is a casual gathering spot for the whole family.

**DINING TABLE**, The Cross Decor & Design; Fritz Hansen Series 7 **DINING CHAIRS**, Inform Interiors.

# IN

Neil Farlette and Wendy Christie's new-build contemporary Vancouver home,

there's a sense of warmth that might surprise those who equate modern design with hard-edged starkness. Yes, there's a glass wall, a floating staircase and open-concept levels flooded with natural light, but the glass wall is one of their children's favourite features, the floating staircase is crafted from black walnut (chosen for its soft tones) and the levels and light create what Neil calls "a real tree-house feel that the kids love."

The coup of striking such a balance, namely a serene, gallery-like space that's also the perfect backdrop for child's play – the couple has a daughter, Cicely, 12, and a son, Michael, 9 – is testament to how well the pair complements each other. "I lean toward modern," says Neil, "while Wendy's style is more eclectic. Our goal was to build a contemporary home that's still West Coast casual and playful. And, like all couples do, we sometimes agreed to disagree."



**ABOVE & LEFT** Floor-to-ceiling walnut cabinetry, a large island with hidden storage and folding glass doors to the patio make the kitchen, which is open to the family room, the entertaining hub Neil and his wife, Wendy Christie, were after.

Christian Woo **STOOLS**, Inform Interiors.



**FAR LEFT** In the family room, an inexpensive sectional echoes a custom-made version that sits in the living room. Abstract artwork, toss cushions and colourful pouffes complete the easygoing design. The rug adds both texture and functionality: "It's key for acoustics, especially in a modern space," says designer Denise Ashmore. "And it's cozy enough for the kids to hang out on and read or do a puzzle."

**SIDE TABLE, solid TOSS CUSHIONS, 18Karat; TRAY TABLE, Baridesign; Salsa Lounge POUFFES, RUG, Salari Fine Carpet Collections; Tolomeo Mega FLOOR LAMP, Inform Interiors; Interconnected World ARTWORK, Norah Borden.**

**BELOW** Denise had the family room's fireplace surround finished with concrete that was custom-coloured to match the walls. Framed by walnut, it's a chic focal point and adds warm tones to the space, which are picked up in the antique Mid-Century Modern armchair, the Eames turned stool and the credenza and floating shelves that Denise designed.

Custom **CRENZENZA & FLOATING SHELVES, Project 22 Design.**



One thing they didn't disagree on was the home's location in the city's west side Riley Park neighbourhood. "It's close to Main Street, which has a great vibe, with restaurants, shops and even microbreweries," says Neil. "And the street has a collection of magnificent oak trees that give it great presence." While the lot was perfect, the 900-square-foot wartime bungalow that sat on it proved to be a challenge even for Neil and Wendy, property developers whose company, Benchmark Developments, specializes in heritage restoration. "We tried to save the old house," says Neil. "But it had a poor foundation and very little we could work with."

Starting with a clean slate, they enlisted architectural designer Paul Phillips of Environmental Design Group and interior designer Denise Ashmore of Project 22 Design. "We had collaborated with them on previous projects and both were available, so everything came together nicely," says Neil. Building began in June 2011, and after a year the structure was in place: a 2,916-square-foot, three-storey split-level home with four bedrooms, a basement media room and a rooftop deck. Throughout the construction, Denise worked closely with the architect to ensure the space would be family friendly. "I tweaked the floor plan to ensure the kitchen opened to the family room so everyone's visible and feels together," she says.

Materials were also crucial in creating a welcoming vibe. "I chose walnut as the predominant material on the main floor. It has a lovely warm hue, which gains patina over time and becomes even richer. I had it oil finished so it can stand up to the wear and tear of the kids, and any stains can be lightly sanded away," says Denise. The modern split-level design afforded another child-minded opportunity. "It allowed me to put the kids' bedrooms on one floor, so they can have their own space and retreat to their own zone." Even so, retreating isn't really the norm. Neil says, "We're real homebodies, and we love to use and enjoy the whole house together as a family."

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**ABOVE** Flooded with natural light, the walnut spinal staircase makes a bold sculptural statement. It's closed in by a wall of tempered glass that's mounted in channels on the floor and ceiling, and attached to the stairs with stainless steel pins. It beautifully capitalizes on the open-concept floor plan and is also easy to clean and safe.

*Fractal Coast ARTWORK,*  
Norah Borden.

**LEFT** The master bathroom features a floating walnut vanity topped with honed Calacatta gold marble and fitted with spacious drawers for out-of-sight storage. A mix of polished and honed porcelain wall and floor tiles in different sizes keeps the look from being too uniform.

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Custom-coloured concrete tiles front the sleek fireplace in the living room. Their horizontal placement and smooth finish nicely contrast the vertical lines and textured grain of the walnut walls.

Christian Woo Cluster **COFFEE TABLES**, Eames **LOUNGER & OTTOMAN**, Inform Interiors.