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HOME ISSUE

PATRICIA GRAY
An interview with one of Canada's top designers

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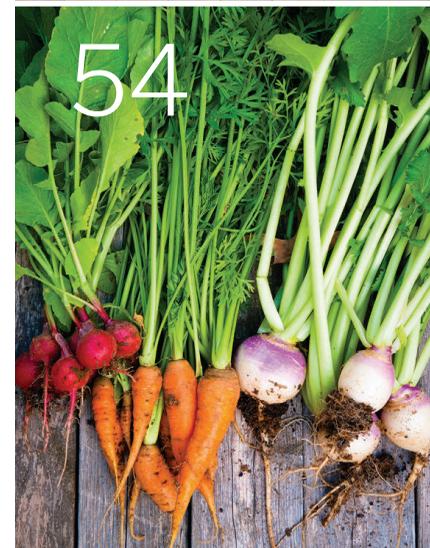
INTERIOR COUTURE

Inside the eight-storey Vancouver townhome of Patricia Gray, designer of choice for stars like John Travolta.

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INTERIOR COUTURE

YAM's one-on-one with Canada's
A-list designer Patricia Gray

By Ivan Meade | Photos by Joshua Lawrence



If Canada has a celebrity among interior designers, it is Patricia Gray, the designer of choice for stars like John Travolta — and the woman whose approach to design can best be described as couture.

Only the rarest of interior designers develops the kind of signature style that seems to come so naturally to Vancouver's Patricia Gray. It's a style which, over a three-decade career, has won her accolades, awards, and features in prestigious magazines like *Architectural Digest*. Nowhere is Gray's signature style showcased more naturally than in her eight-story Alberni Street live/work townhome. Here, the vibe is cosmopolitan but there's no clinical showroom sensibility — this space is designed for living beautifully.

Gray is one of those creatives whose design sensibilities seem to have evolved seamlessly from traditional to contemporary, never bowing to trendiness but always seeming *au courant*. Gray doesn't do trends; she sets trends. She even creates fine art for her clients and produces custom furniture through her own millwork company, upholstery workroom, and drapery workroom. As the daughter of a couture seamstress, is it any wonder Gray describes her approach to interior design as couture? And yes, if these rooms could walk, they would be on the world's most fashionable runways.

◀ A traditional custom leatherette bench with mohair pillows is juxtaposed with a Eero Saarinen-inspired Tulip table and a Bocci 27-light chandelier that extends two levels, tying together the dining room with the breakfast nook.



You are celebrating 30 years in business as one of the top designers in Canada. How has your aesthetic evolved over the years?

I am much more concerned about editing and making sure all the details are correct. Design is much more than filling a space with 'stuff.' We are living in a time when everything is so disposable. I put a great deal of attention into designing things that will stand the test of time.

I ask myself all the time: "what will this look like in 20 years, will it still be current, will it stand up to use, does it work, is it beautiful?" I believe our surroundings affect our world and everything we do. We may not be conscious of this on a deep level, but life is better when we are happy in our homes.

You have created a very memorable, elegant signature style. How do you make every space unique for the homeowner, and at the same time achieve your imprint as a designer?

I feel I have a responsibility as a designer to create something special for each client. Everyone who comes to me has a dream. My job is to make that dream a reality. I give a great deal of thought to how my clients will live in their homes, what is their lifestyle, what are their particular requirements in order that the finished interiors reflect their personalities. As well as my clients having a unique personality, every space has a unique personality. Sometimes I sit in the space and let it speak to me and try to figure out what it wants to be. If attention to detail and consideration are put into the interior design process up-front, the results will be long lasting.

◀ In her eight-story townhome, planks of sumptuous wenge wood, one of the world's few naturally dark woods, create a rich sense of unity throughout. Plexiglass staircase railings add an airy, open feel, and Gray customized an IKEA bookcase to stylishly take full advantage of the ample ceiling height. The townhome is painted throughout with Benjamin Moore's White Cloud OC-130, the designer's favourite. From this neutral foundation colour, it is easy to layer in materials and textures.

Clients are becoming more sophisticated and design-conscious. How has that influenced you?

I love it when my clients have an appreciation for design. I think we all inherently want to be surrounded by beauty. Our lives are enriched in the process.

Speaking of sophisticated, design-conscious clients, you have had the opportunity to work on the homes of celebrities such as John Travolta, the iron chef Rob Feenie, and many others. How is it working with celebrities?

Basically, in our homes we all have the same requirements. The common denominator is that we all want a home that supports and nurtures us so that we can better go out into the world and live our unique calling. In our noisy and complex world, a home should be a breathing space — a place to just be — in surroundings that provide calm and harmony. When I have done my job well, I have designed a special place for my clients to live their best life imaginable.

What are your three must-haves in any home?

Comfortable seating, good lighting, and a floor plan that works. What is better than sitting in a comfortable chair, and having a table beside you to place a drink on — and everywhere you look you rest your eyes on beautiful objects. When you live with beautiful things, you stimulate your mind and you enjoy life a little more. I also believe we should live in places that we have to live up to.

What inspires you these days?

I travel or spend time in nature for inspiration. I try to visit New York and Paris each year. I cannot help but be inspired in these cities. I love to visit the art galleries, eat in good restaurants, shop, sightsee, and generally soak up as much as I can. When I need to recharge my batteries, so to speak, I spend time in nature. That is where the inspiration for creating my artwork comes from.

A few years ago, I spent some time in Desolation Sound and came back to my studio and did a series of paintings based on capturing the translucency



The rust and earth tones of Gray's painting accentuate the rich woods of the Georgian breakfast table and Louis XV fauteuil (chair). A cube in creamy crushed velvet provides an unexpected touch of the modern. On the table, Gray has artfully arranged some of her favourite objects, including silver jewellery from Morocco.

Macassar ebony wood provides a dramatic contrast to the white Corian countertops and cabinets with their clean-lined Lucite handles. Tempered glass behind the stovetop acts as a backsplash without hiding the rich beauty of one of the world's most expensive woods. Above the stove, a stainless steel floating shelf backed by a mirror is a stylish showcase for glassware.



and refraction of light through water. I spent time over Christmas in Palm Desert and would go out into the desert at sunset with my water colours to capture the changing light. Those are the moments that totally recharge and inspire me.

You started creating fine art over five years ago with tremendous success. I believe you are using your art to complement your interiors and complete your vision as a designer. How has the process been for you and how have clients responded?

My art is a very personal experience. I paint for myself and it is a bonus that my clients respond to it and want my pieces hanging in their homes.

My inspiration for my art comes from my love of colour, texture, line and balance — which sounds cliché in print but somehow takes on a life of its own in the translation onto the canvas.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Yum, that's easy. A good bottle of wine and dark chocolate. ::