

HOMES

A house in Toronto, between bold geometries and precious touches of colour

by **Sonia S. Braca**
October 2, 2022

In Annex, one of Toronto's finest neighbourhoods, Brian O'Brian and Gillian Segal revolutionized the architecture and interiors of an Art Deco style home.

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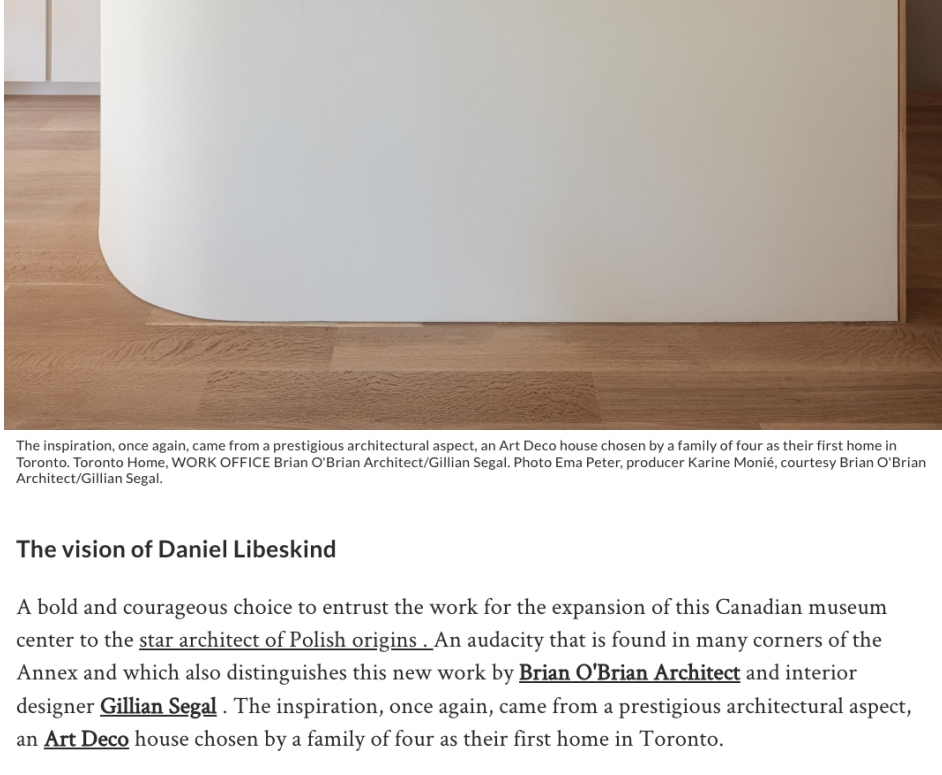
Everything appears in order and cared for. The visitor's gaze rests on the terracotta tiles, the pyramidal roofs and the characteristic red bricks that embellish the facades of many houses. Built between 1880 and 1910, they are the authentic triumph of **Victorian**, **Queen Anne** and **Richardsonian Romanesque**, a style which owes its name to the American architect **Henry Hobson Richardson**.



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Architectural revival and innovation

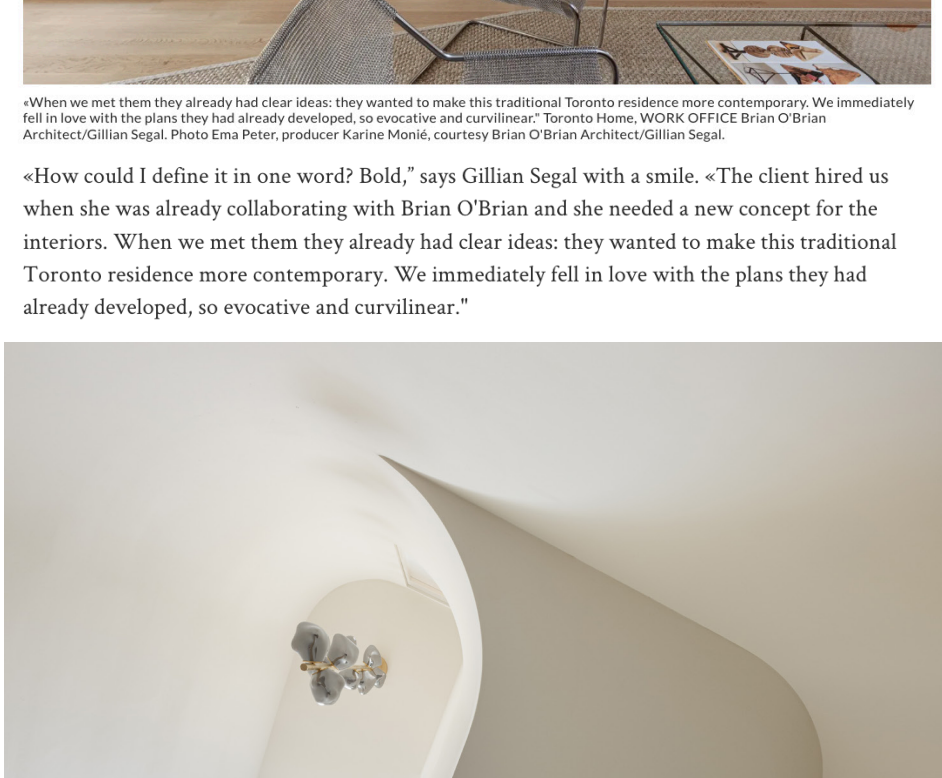
The rushing **Credit River**, with its plum and pink sandstones, has made **Annex** one of the finest neighborhoods in the entire city. But just let yourself be guided by curiosity to sink into the unpredictable architectural revival of this area of **Toronto, Ontario**: excellent examples pass before our eyes capable of declining **English Cottage**, **Tudor** and **Georgian**. But the surprises aren't over: on the corner of **Bloor Street** and **Avenue Road**, north of **Queen's Park** and east of **Toronto University's** philosophers' walk, here is an authentic apparition. It shines in the sunlight there **Michael Lee-Chin Crystal**, new wing of the **Royal Ontario Museum**, sliver of glass and anodized aluminum reaching towards the sky designed by **Daniel Libeskind**.



The inspiration, once again, came from a prestigious architectural aspect: an Art Deco house chosen by a family of four as their first home in Toronto. Toronto Home, WORK OFFICE Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal. Photo Ema Peter, producer Karine Monzi, courtesy Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal.

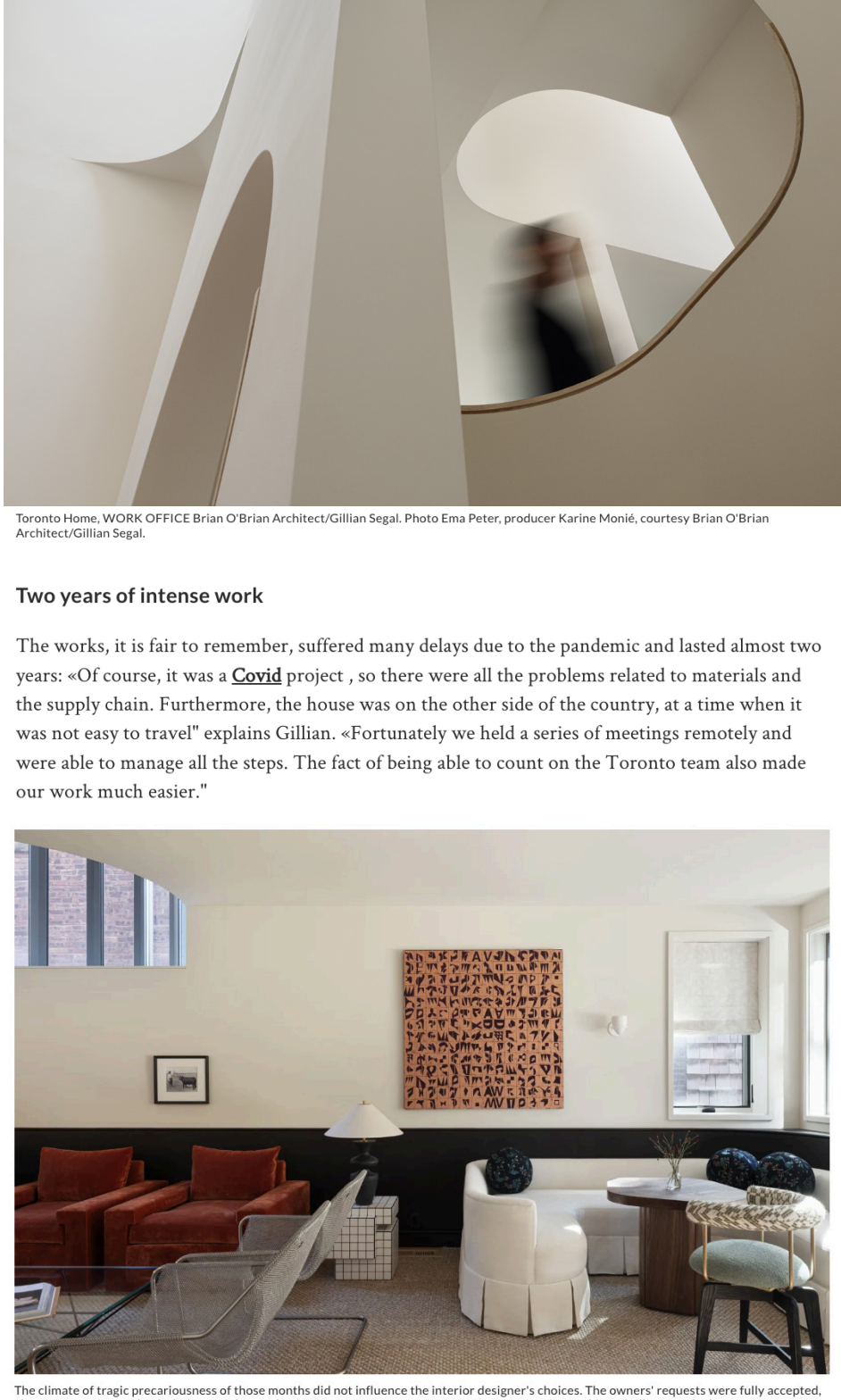
The vision of Daniel Libeskind

A bold and courageous choice to entrust the work for the expansion of this Canadian museum center to the **star architect of Polish origins**. An audacity that is found in many corners of the Annex and which also distinguishes this new work by **Brian O'Brian Architect** and interior designer **Gillian Segal**. The inspiration, once again, came from a prestigious architectural aspect, an **Art Deco** house chosen by a family of four as their first home in Toronto.



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"How could I define it in one word? Bold," says Gillian Segal with a smile. "The client hired us when she was already collaborating with Brian O'Brian and she needed a new concept for the interiors. When we met them they already had clear ideas: they wanted to make this traditional Toronto residence more contemporary. We immediately fell in love with the plans they had already developed, so evocative and curvilinear."



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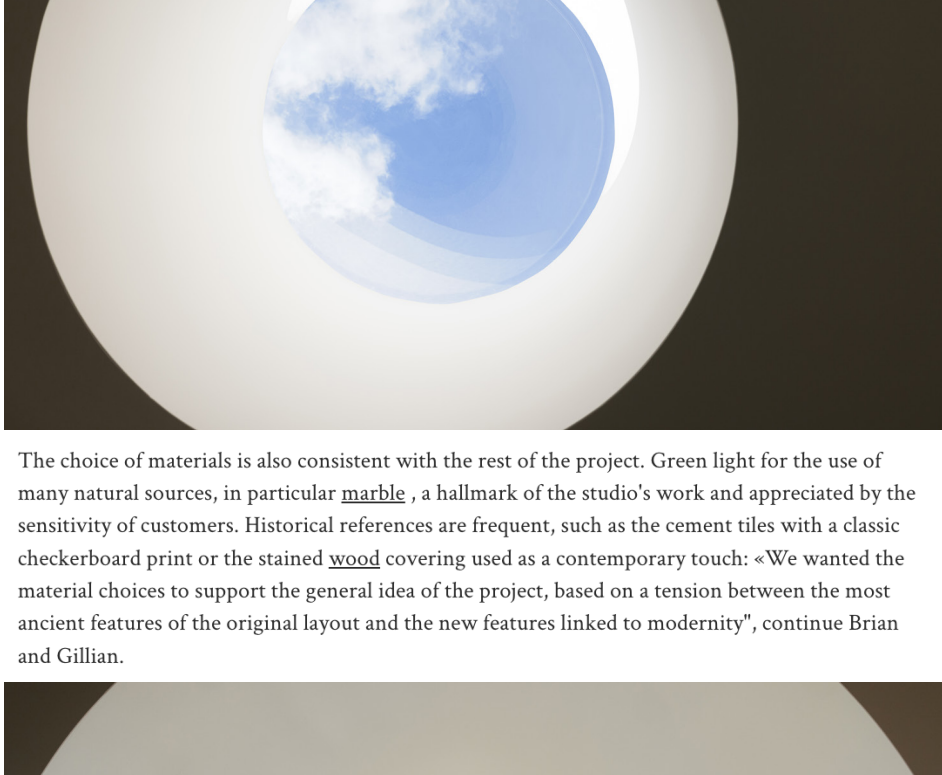
Two years of intense work

The works, it is fair to remember, suffered many delays due to the pandemic and lasted almost two years: "Of course, it was a **Covid** project, so there were all the problems related to materials and the supply chain. Furthermore, the house was on the other side of the country, at a time when it was not easy to travel" explains Gillian. "Fortunately we held a series of meetings remotely and were able to manage all the steps. The fact of being able to count on the Toronto team also made our work much easier."



The climate of tragic precariousness of those months did not influence the interior designer's choices. The owners' requests were fully accepted, almost in reaction to the dark times of the pandemic. Toronto Home, WORK OFFICE Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal. Photo Ema Peter, producer Karine Monzi, courtesy Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal.

The climate of tragic precariousness of those months did not influence the interior designer's choices. The owners' requests were fully accepted, almost as a reaction to the dark times of the pandemic: "Our client expected a lot of color and bold, extreme choices from us. This is why we were in complete harmony from the beginning. It was music to our ears and the collaboration between us, Brian, the customers and the builder was truly wonderful," says Gillian. "We wanted to create a space that felt warm, playful and sophisticated. I believe that the traditional references, combined with elements of unexpected eccentricity and some dramatic choices, such as the **red kitchen**, give this house an atmosphere of great charm, but at the same time extremely easy."



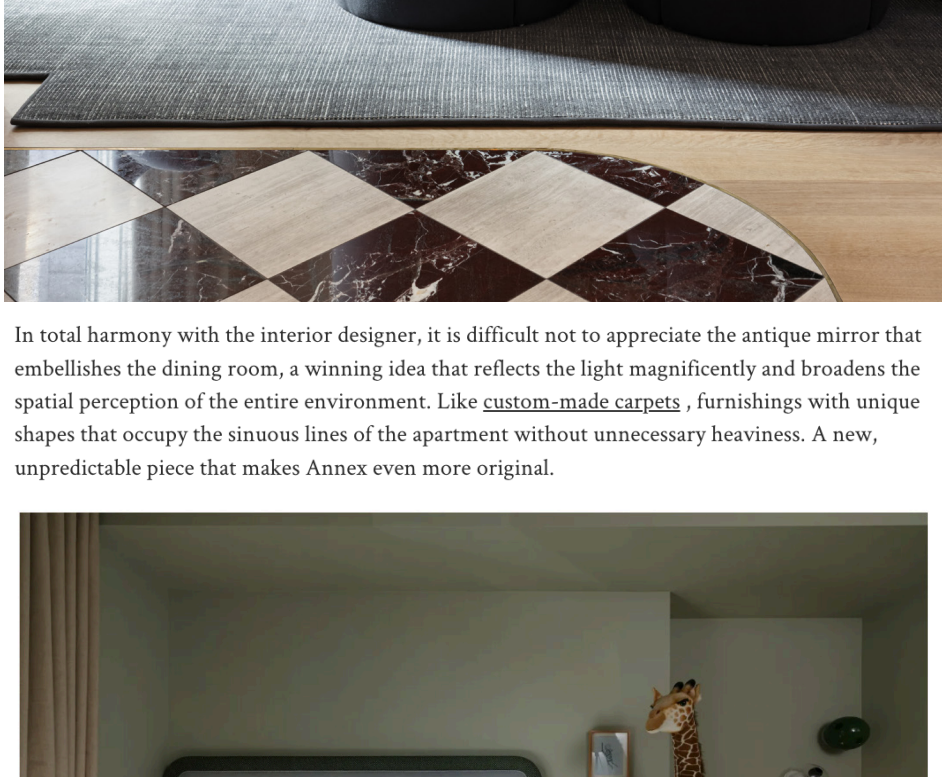
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Light and color

In fact, in this 4-storey house, with 4 bedrooms and lots of space available, it is the personality of those who live there that emerges from the many details scattered here and there with a methodical desire to amaze. Also a way to reassure and resolve the many doubts raised over time by the owners: "During the first inspection, the client was worried about the bay window on the south side" recalls architect Brian O'Brian. "So the window became the basis for all the spatial and formal geometries of the entire house. We used its implicit circle to create the building's central light source, then rotating the other spaces from that point."



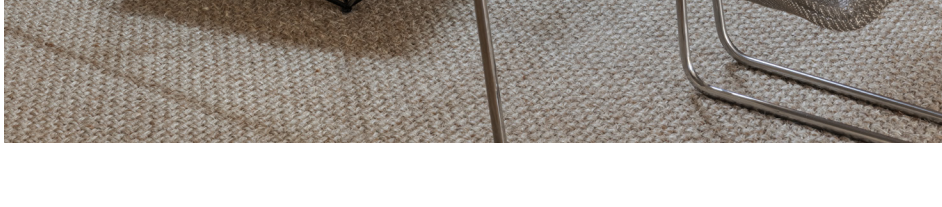
The choice of materials is also consistent with the rest of the project. Green light for the use of many natural sources, in particular **marble**, a hallmark of the studio's work and appreciated by the sensitivity of customers. Historical references are frequent, such as the cement tiles with a classic checkerboard print or the stained **wood** covering used as a contemporary touch: "We wanted the material choices to support the general idea of the project, based on a tension between the most ancient features of the original layout and the new features linked to modernity", continue Brian and Gillian.



Gillian Segal concludes again: "working with Brian was a great satisfaction and we were very happy to meet such helpful and affable customers. My favorite room? Probably the powder room, although the kitchen and the other bathrooms - the guest bathroom and the master bathroom - come next. All the choices related to lighting are special, such as the lights by **Anna Karlin** - in the dining room - and the pendant by **Josef Hoffman** - in the toilet. The silver 'chainmail' chairs in the living room are also a playful and incredibly comfortable piece."



In total harmony with the interior designer, it is difficult not to appreciate the antique mirror that embellishes the dining room, a winning idea that reflects the light magnificently and broadens the spatial perception of the entire environment. Like **custom-made carpets**, furnishings with unique shapes that occupy the sinuous lines of the apartment without unnecessary heaviness. A new, unpredictable piece that makes Annex even more original.



The custom-made carpets, furnishings with unique shapes, occupy the sinuous lines of the apartment without unnecessary heaviness. Toronto Home, WORK OFFICE Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal. Photo Ema Peter, producer Karine Monzi, courtesy Brian O'Brian Architect/Gillian Segal.

