

# Globe Real Estate



**Cluttered space  
given loft look**

**CANDICE OLSON, G13**

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### URBAN SPACES

# Chickens on the doorstep



Laneway living in Toronto can be an eye opener, **CAROLYN LEITCH** finds. At Michael Taylor's hidden home, garage parties are frequent and a stray hen fits right in



PHOTOS BY DONALD WEBER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL



The exterior of the former dairy is largely untouched. The living room, top, overlooks a portion of the building where the roof was removed to create a small, vine-covered terrace. Middle, a view of the kitchen from the living room, and above, the centre island adjacent to the kitchen.



The first thing would-be visitors to architect Michael Taylor's unique Toronto home need to know is how to navigate the maze of one-way streets near Dupont and Dufferin.

Then, from a quiet side street, they must find their way down a narrow laneway past Hannah the friendly Pomeranian, and the garages where many of Mr. Taylor's European immigrant neighbours enjoy sitting and talking, or having a drink.

Another right turn at a white gar-

age leads into an alley and up to the unpainted, galvanized metal door of the house Mr. Taylor shares with his partner, James O'Connor.

There, in a converted dairy, the couple have created an unusual home where the high ceilings, open spaces and industrial touches of a loft are combined with the seclusion of a hidden retreat.

"Somehow this building got nestled in here," Mr. Taylor says of the 2,100 square feet tucked behind another house.

Laneways, in his opinion, can provide needed living spaces in the

city centre, reducing the need for more high-rises. But he finds laneway living attractive on a personal level as well.

"We live in cities because we enjoy having people around us," he says, adding that he likes the more private world that exists just off city streets.

"There is an interesting back-lane culture. People entertain in their garages," he says.

It's also the kind of place where a stray hen can show up at your doorstep, an experience that led Mr. Taylor to suspect that a neighbour

was raising chickens.

He is pleased that that culture extends right to his door, which he has intentionally left stark in order to discourage graffiti artists.

Past the threshold, however, it's totally different. He enjoys seeing the shock of his guests when they encounter the striking contrast between outdoors and in.

"To me, part of the magic is that it doesn't look like anything outside, but you come inside and it's like another world."

See LANEWAY on page G6

# 'You just put a table up and you feel like you're in Italy'

LANEWAY from page G1

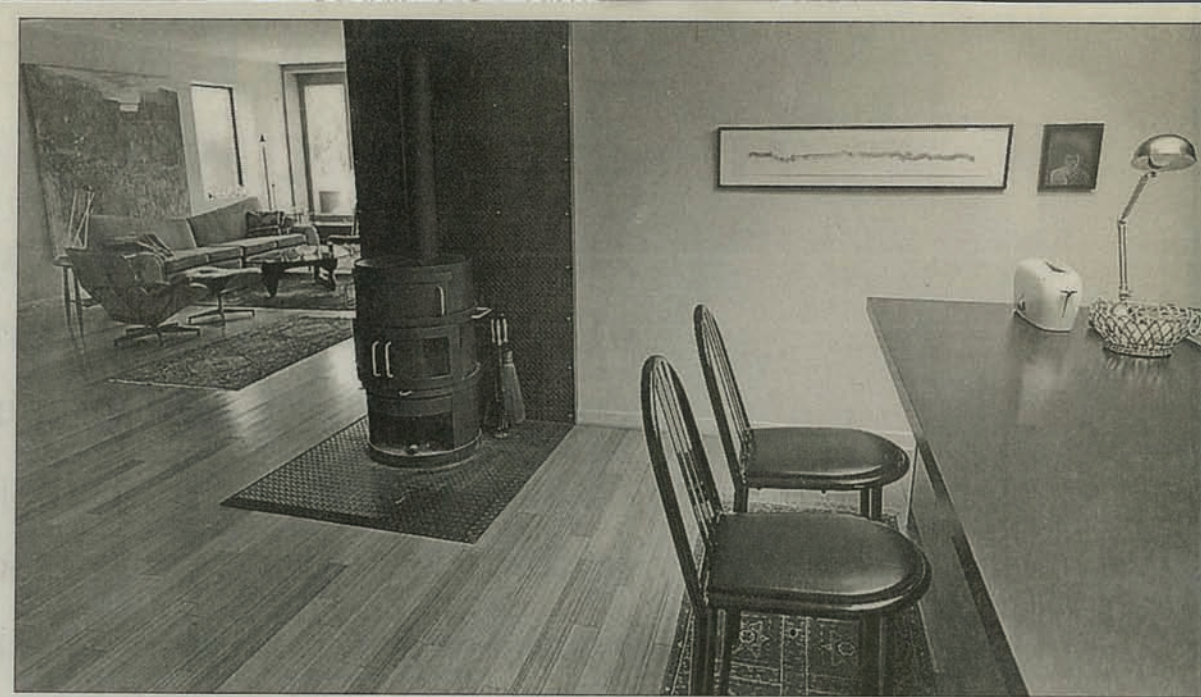
And while the conversion of industrial buildings into lofts has added new housing to the downtown core, he points out that those units often do not offer a verdant outdoor space like his walled terrace garden.

Mr. Taylor was only looking at the house out of curiosity when he first saw it seven years ago. He says it took about 15 minutes to decide to buy it. "I walked in and just felt like I belonged here."

He adds that the family of the previous owner was reluctant to sell the house to anyone who would not preserve its character. Coincidentally, an architect who Mr. Taylor had worked with designed the bathroom in the home. One phone call to her and the family was reassured that Mr. Taylor would keep the special qualities of the house intact.

"It was sort of great karma," he says.

Mr. Taylor has not made many changes, but as a principal at Taylor Smyth Architects, he finds he can



Left, architect Michael Taylor (left) and partner James O'Connor. 'The magic is that it doesn't look like anything outside, but you come inside and it's like another world.'

use the space as a bit of a design lab for finishes and furniture of his own design.

After he installed bamboo floors in the main living area, for example, he recommended that a corporate client, pulp and paper company Abitibi-Consolidated Inc., use the same material in its Montreal offices. "It's such a renewable re-

source," he says of bamboo.

According to Mr. Taylor, the building he inhabits was built about 1912 and converted to a single-family home in the mid-1980s.

Today it consists of a large main-floor living area and kitchen, with an office that doubles as a guest room. Upstairs, the large master bedroom and bathroom open to a second terrace.

One of the only reminders of the building's industrial past was a large, sliding wooden door, which Mr. Taylor removed because it banged in the wind.

He particularly enjoys the home in summer, when he can open up the doors from the living room into the small terrace. This garden space was originally part of the house but a previous owner removed the roof and turned it into an outdoor room with brick walls covered in ivy.

In the warmer months, Mr. Taylor does much of his entertaining there. "You just put a table up and

you feel like you're in Italy."

Throughout the home, Mr. Taylor has added closet space, as well as definition to the rooms in the form of cabinetry. He also hand-picked slate tiles imported from India for the entrance. And in the bathroom, he added a glass-enclosed shower.

One of Mr. Taylor's future projects will involve boosting the storage space in the spare kitchen with new wood cabinets and a stone-topped island.

He likes the idea that the home has evolved over the years under different owners, who have enhanced the building without eradicating its past. "It's almost like there's a legacy of people who have made their impact on the house."

Mr. Taylor, who grew up in "a great, old Victorian monstrosity" near the University of Chicago, moved to Toronto in 1983 after graduating from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

He appreciates Victorian archi-

ture and loves old buildings, he says, but as an architect, he doesn't want to design them "because they speak to a time passed."

On a broader issue, he would like to see the sensibility of the city's planners evolve toward placing a greater importance on beautiful buildings and public spaces, the way their counterparts in cities such as Boston and many places in Europe have.

"I think the vision [in Toronto] is really lacking," he says. "It's just not there yet."

Mr. Taylor thinks it's a shame that more people don't take advantage of the city's nooks and crannies. He believes City Hall should eliminate some of the red tape that places restrictions on building one house behind another.

But the architect does acknowledge one downside to laneway living: He occasionally feels isolated from his neighbours in the traditionally Portuguese area.

People sometimes seem perplexed that an urban professional lives in a back alley, he says. "I think they don't know quite what to make of me."


He mentions other small problems — the city often passes him by when delivering garbage and recycling pick-up schedules, for example, and mail carriers sometimes can't venture into the lane in winter because the snow is not plowed. But he thinks these inconveniences represent, in a way, the city's blind spot when it comes to laneway living.

"The city does tend to forget that I'm here, even though I'm paying taxes like everyone else."

All in all, Mr. Taylor believes that his offbeat dwelling offers a lifestyle he can't imagine trading for one in a more conventional home.

"It still feels special after seven years."

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