CUSTOMS DESIGN

FROM TILES TO ART TO "MAGICAL" LIGHTING, DESIGN IS IN THE BESPOKE DETAILS OF THIS ELEGANTLY TIMELESS CONDO.

BY JOANNE SASVARI | PHOTOS BY JOSHUA LAWRENCE

As soon as Larry and Lorraine saw the Customs House condo overlooking the intersection of Government, Wharf and Humboldt streets, they knew it had everything they wanted in their new home.

"Location, location, location," says Lorraine. "I knew I wanted to be here and I wanted floor-to-ceiling windows. I wanted to look at this" — she waves at the view of the Inner Harbour just beyond her living room window — "all the time and I wanted a walkable lifestyle."

Make that *almost* everything they wanted. Missing? A design they truly loved. Enter Iván Meade, principal of Meade Design Group, who was introduced to the couple by Realtor Noah Dobson.

"We were playing with what the building was giving us and then adding to it to make it unique so it doesn't look like the rest of the apartments in the building," Meade says. "Something I really appreciate with Larry and Lorraine is they were really open to suggestions."

What they have created is a warm, welcoming space that is filled with art and perfectly frames the glorious view beyond the windows. "My goal was to see that view from every place," Meade says. "Every seating place, you are seeing something beautiful. That was very important to us."

Designer Iván Meade infused this condo with bespoke details from the kitchen's slatted-wood hood vent to the built-in banquette and grand table in the dining area.

Above: In the den, LED strip lighting illuminates a display of handmade, crosshatched glass discs by Global Views, as well as the slat detailing on the cabinetry, which hides an abundance of storage.

Left: Iván Meade designed the custom armoire in the front hallway (as well as the silk Persiana cushion), with built-in cabinetry crafted by Ryan Bijold and metalwork by Bronte Freeman. The *Dancing Bear* sculpture by Nunavut carver Louie Uttaq frolics in the light of a Lambert et Fils wall sconce and against the backdrop of the Phillip Jeffries Western Weave wallpaper in Bolo Silver.

HERITAGE MEETS HOME

The Customs House is one of Victoria's most intriguing buildings, not just because of its heritage design and prominent Inner Harbour location, but because of all those years it spent being mysterious under scaffolding.

The original Empire-style building was built in 1914 on the foundation of the city's 1898 post office, with a faux heritage section on Government Street added in the 1950s. In 2017, Victoria-based Cielo Properties began transforming the property into luxury condominiums with ground floor commercial spaces, combining a multi-year heritage restoration of the original building with a new, seven-storey structure that replaced the 1950s addition.

The project first caught Larry and Lorraine's attention in 2020 when they were visiting family here from their home in Saskatoon. But COVID intervened and they had to rush back home before they could make a decision. "When we flew home on the plane, people were in hazmat suits," Lorraine recalls. "[The move] got put on hold for a bit. Then we came back."

On their return, Larry and Lorraine found a unit on the newer side of the property, where the units have fireplaces, outdoor decks and more square footage than the heritage side. (The older side does, however, have the exposed brick and vintage charm.) Then they hired Meade to create a whole new custom design.

During the year-and-a-half-long process, Meade concentrated on three things: improving the flow of the space; making what was originally a fairly minimalist design feel warmer and more welcoming; and finding as many clever ways to add storage as possible.

"We wanted to use what was here, but to improve it. I don't want to create waste as a designer," Meade says, adding that the idea was "not just to have a design for everyday living," but to create something of lasting value. "This is timeless. This will never go out of style."

ROOM WITH A VIEW

Step inside and right away you're greeted by what looks like a sleekly curved contemporary work of art. It's actually a custom-designed feature that comprises seating, storage drawers and space to display one of the many sculptures Lorraine has collected. "For the entryway, we wanted to evoke movement," Meade says, noting that the dark metal and blond wood "create curves and softness." Underneath, soft white light makes the piece look like it's floating — indeed, Lorraine describes the clever use of lighting throughout the apartment as simply "magical."

The hallway leads past an office-slash-den to the open-plan kitchen-dining-living area and the views beyond its tall windows, which sweep from the Fairmont Empress to the B.C. Parliament Buildings and farther west across the harbour.

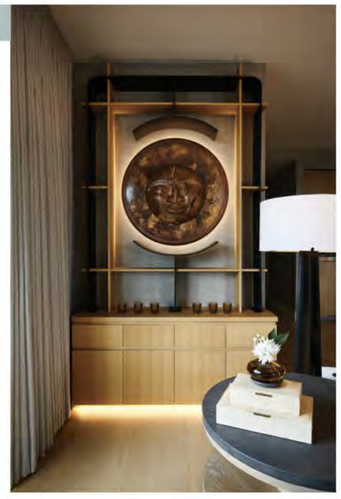
Above: The custom-built banquette and dining table are designed both for entertaining and enjoying the Inner Harbour view. The slatted wood feature behind it is a showcase for art, notably the painting by Saskatoon-based artist Jane Harrington.

To the left is the kitchen, with its large, entertaining-friendly island and dramatic backsplash tiles, their vertical lines playing off those in the custom-designed slatted-wood hood vent. In fact, throughout the space, there's a deliberate dialogue between materials, whether metal, marble, fabric or the warm, caramel-hued wood that is either slatted or flat, depending on how it's used. The whole idea, Meade says, was "to add character and play with the tonalities of the wood. Everything that is flat wood is very calm and everything with slats has character."

Between the kitchen and windows, Meade created a chic dining area with an elegant, leather-cushioned banquette and a gorgeous custom table in pale wood. Behind the banquette is a tableau of mirrored glass smoked "to create a West Coast mood," a painting by Saskatoon-based artist Jane Harrington and sculptures tucked into alcoves. "People love that table. They just sit there and drink in that view," Lorraine says. "I do love the banquette because it's such a showpiece."

In the main living area, the eye is immediately drawn to the fireplace with its stunning bronze half-moon sculpture and mirror by French artist Nico Tournaire. It reflects another dramatic piece of lunar wall art across the room, the *Rose Honey Moon* sculpture by B.C. artist Richard Menard. "Purposely we played with the moon and the sun, and played off that mirror with that other beautiful piece," Meade says.

Below: In the living room, a bronze half-moon sculpture and mirror by French artist Nico Tournaire has pride of place over the fireplace. Seating is gathered around coffee tables designed to evoke river stones.



Above: Dramatically veined Arabescato Vagli marble covers the kitchen island, while the perimeter counters gleam in Vicostone Tartufo honed quartz. Oak floors and built-ins create a sense of warmth, notably the slatted hood vent designed by Meade and executed by Freeman and Bijold. The backsplash tile is the Obelisque pattern in Kelly Wearstler's Liaison collection for Ann Sacks, and the Rosetta XL Pendants are part of the Aerin Collection by Visual Comfort.

Right: LED strips illuminate the *Rose Honey Moon* sculpture by B.C. artist Richard Menard.

Swivel armchairs and a cozy sofa gather around a coffee table Meade custom designed to look like river stones. A slatted-wood cabinet is a hiding place for the television, which pops up at the touch of a button, then slides discreetly away. More cabinetry hides any clutter and creates a platform for more sculptures. A small deck offers a perfect viewpoint for sunsets.

Throughout, a palette of brown, taupe, cream and grey — on the walls, floor, window coverings and furnishings, and often with a subtle pattern and a touch of shimmer — is designed to be warm and comfortable, a counterbalance to Victoria's cool, grey winters. "And there's texture everywhere," says Meade, who credits Lorraine for her "very sophisticated taste in fabrics."

'STORAGE, STORAGE, STORAGE'

The thing about good design, Meade says, is that everything has a purpose. He paraphrases the legendary mid-century Charles Eames: "Design is in the details. You take out the details, you take out the design." And it's in the private areas that Meade's meticulous attention to detail truly shines.

The primary bedroom is not only a showcase for even more art and that killer view, it's also filled with thoughtful details, from the hotel-style charging stations and reading lights beside the bed to the blackout curtains and storage drawers hidden under it.

In the bedroom, a painting by local artist Rick Bond hangs over the bed, which is covered in Vera Wang bedding and the Garza pillow from Meade's collection.

Looking for design inspo?

Spruce magazine is coming to the Home Show! Come find us at the Spruce booth, say hi, and pick up your copy of the Fall Issue.

We'll see you there!

The Fall Home Show

October 16-18, 2026

Pacific Recreation Centre

3100 Tillicum Road

SPRUCE

VICTORIA'S HOME & DESIGN MAGAZINE

The marble-tiled ensuite bathroom, meanwhile, is what Meade calls "Lorraine's spa sanctuary" and features a set of Bocci lights dangling above a soaker tub, with a piece of art placed perfectly in the bather's sightline. Wallpaper, a mix of tile patterns and various metal finishes add texture and visual interest to the space. "If you know how to do it, it works," Meade says. "You can play with shape and material, but it doesn't compete."

Then there's the walk-in closet, with its warm wood drawers, soft but effective lighting and tinted glass cabinetry that allows Larry and Lorraine to see their clothes while keeping them safe from light and dust. "This is a good example of how to customize a closet for a client," Meade says.

And everywhere — tucked behind panels or inside pieces of furniture — there's space for shoes, sweaters, Christmas ornaments, linens, you name it. "Wherever we could, we added storage," Meade says. "Storage storage, storage, but it works beautifully."

It does. But so does every element of this space designed to be beautiful and livable, inside and out, now and for the future.

"I would be hard-pressed to say what's my favourite," adds Lorraine. "I love it all, actually."

Above: The primary bedroom is packed with hidden storage and thoughtful details like this makeup table.

Above left: Bocci lights hang above the tub in the spa-like ensuite bathroom, ideal for soaking with a good book.

RESOURCE LIST

Interior design: Meade Design Group

Principal designer: Iván Meade

Junior designer: Beth Brown

Millwork: Ryan Bijold, Bijold Custom Cabinetry

Metalwork: Bronte Freeman, Freeman Fabrication

Window treatments: Monika Kurc

Electrical: Jay Corder, Corder Electric

Contractor: Mat Lord

ISLAND WINDOW COVERINGS LTD.
40 YEARS
HunterDouglas
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS SERVING GREATER VICTORIA AND THE GULF ISLANDS
Visit our Showroom at 3381 Tennyson Avenue in Victoria
(250) 475-2600 | islandwindowcoverings.com
COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATIONS