

THE 'I ♥ VANCOUVER IN THE WINTER' ISSUE

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Built With Love

AN ARCHITECT AND HIS DESIGN-SAVVY GIRLFRIEND JOIN FORCES TO RENOVATE A KITSILANO BUNGALOW AND END UP ENGAGED



by AMY MAIR
photography by TRACEY AYTON

In 2009, Formwerks Architectural founder Jim Bussey scooped up a modest Kits old-timer located within walking distance of Spanish Banks with the intention to reno and flip it. But plans changed when Bussey's longtime girlfriend, Jenna Girard, decided to purchase the home for herself and the two began to work on the project together.

"When it came to building, I had a client on my hands who was deeply involved in my life helping me with the decision-making," says Bussey.

Bussey said his goal was to balance his need to create a home with long-term resale value with Girard's desire to create a highly personal project that reflected her stylish and whimsical personality.

For the exterior, Bussey took little input from Girard and concentrated on the character detailing, from rafter tails to shingle siding, for which his firm is known.

When it came to the interior, Girard, who had spent years staging and managing properties for family and friends, had ideas of her own.

"I am the friend who comes for tea and when you go to the bathroom I rearrange all the cushions in your living room and say 'I hope you like it.'"

Girard refers to her signature style as "antique Parisian," a look she first encountered when she moved to Paris to study at the Sorbonne at the age of 18.

A melding of two styles

The seasoned architect began the project by establishing a comfortable main floor plan



TRÈS CHIC (Above) Jenna loves antique Parisian decor, a look that includes lots of black, white and grey finishings mixed with vintage and sparkly accessories. She honed her personal style while at university in Paris. **SOUND FOUNDATION** (Right) Jenna and Jim defied the stereotype that a renovation can cause romantic discord. The couple got engaged during the project while on a vacation to Cancun. **NICE ARRANGEMENT** (Below) Jenna does home staging for family and friends. "I am the friend who comes for tea and when you go to the bathroom I rearrange all the cushions in your living room and say 'I hope you like it.'"





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CREATE A LITTLE HOME-MANCE

Homeowner Jenna Girard offers up the following tips on creating a warm, romantic environment.

1. Keep it clutter-free

A sink full of dishes and paperwork strewn across the table can send the signal that your priorities are elsewhere. When your space is clear, there is nothing to focus on but the person you want to spend time with, says Girard. In a pinch, stash things in a drawer or cupboard, but get extra items out of the way.

2. Choose warm whites

Off-white walls are timeless and contribute to a tranquil, serene environment. Girard painted all main interior walls Benjamin Moore's Navajo White. She even used the creamy shade in a lacquer finish on her kitchen cabinets.

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3. Burn sensuous scents

Girard likes candles by luxury fragrance manufacturer Jo Malone (holtrenfrew.com) as well as W room spray (whotelthystore.com) from the W Hotel, a sexy and green scented fragrance of Corsican lemon, laurel leaves and lime blossom.

and adding features with universal appeal, such as a basement suite and expansive windows. The overall design then served as a neutral backdrop for Girard's more personal choices that included mirrored surfaces, antique lighting and a liberal use of black and white.

Bussey admits he was hesitant at first about some of Girard's selections – from a mirrored kitchen backsplash to dramatic period lighting.

"I had never installed *used* lighting before and it took me a while to get used to the idea, but I grew to love it," says Bussey.

Other suggestions from Girard, such as extra storage drawers in the eaves, were nixed after Bussey determined them to be too expensive.

"I can't help but be impressed that in spite of the fact that Jenna wasn't a professional, together we produced something that neither of us could have done alone." –Architect Jim Bussey

"He let me source and choose, but he wouldn't let me make a mistake," says Girard. "If Jim made a choice that I wasn't happy with, he would tell me to learn to love it. Jim taught me how to let go of some of my ideas."

Midway through the project, while on vacation in Cancun, the couple got engaged.

And while Bussey is an experienced builder, he admits that the result of their collaboration was a bit unexpected.

"It was a success," says Bussey. "I can't help but be impressed that in spite of the fact that Jenna wasn't a professional, together we produced something that neither of us could have done alone." ■

Girard continues to live in her renovated Kits home with her two sons. She and Bussey are currently planning their wedding and will eventually build a home together.



BRIGHT IDEA

THE MOST STRIKING ASPECT OF THE INTERIOR DESIGN IN Girard's home is the period lighting in every room. The homeowner enlisted the help of spa owner and interior designer Claudine Michaud of Bioéthique Spa in Kitsilano to help select the unique luminaries after spying a 1930s cut-glass globe light dangling in the front window of Michaud's shop.

"Period lighting makes a space so unique, interesting and individual," says Michaud. "Each piece has its own history and story."

An added bonus: antique lighting can be surprisingly affordable. All lights for Girard's home were purchased for between \$1.99 and \$155 on eBay.

Michaud scoured eBay using the search terms "swag light," "vintage hanging lights" and "Art Deco lamp." She then narrowed the thousands of choices down to 50, and together Girard and Michaud selected 14.

The interior designer points out that it is important to have a vision when sourcing vintage lighting. For example, she purchased a cut-glass, spiral chandelier from the 1960s that she divided up into three pendant lights to hang over the breakfast bar. The lights were then hung with aircraft wire, available at hardware stores, to give things a contemporary look and also to ensure that the lights remained secure.

"It is often hard to tell the context of the lights if they are taken from someone's home with their own furnishings," says Michaud. "You need to have an eye."

Michaud recommends purchasing an eBay buyer protection plan to safeguard against breakage. Also, be prepared to pay extra for shipping and handling.

"It's like treasure hunting," says Michaud. "It is like opening presents. You never know exactly what you are getting until it arrives."