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*call
of
nature*



When designer Michelle Morelan and her husband, Brian, bought this 3,500-square-foot house in Nanaimo, B.C., they had their eyes on the prize: the breathtaking view of Long Lake. Of course, this picturesque natural setting became the primary source of inspiration for the designer's paint picks and fabric choices, resulting in a beautifully serene space that plays on the senses and blurs the lines between indoors and out.

TEXT KATHLEEN DORE | PHOTOGRAPHY TRACEY AYTON

Homeowner and designer Michelle Morelan custom designed the wraparound banquette for the breakfast nook so that it would serve multiple functions: It disguises the short windows; acts as an informal eating spot and lounge area; and turns into beds! With only two bedrooms, Michelle needed more bunk space, so she made the banquette wide enough to accommodate two people.

DESIGN, Michelle Morelan Design, michellemorelan-design.com; Cloud White CC-40 **WALL PAINT** (throughout), Benjamin Moore; **THROW**, Heather Ross Natural Eclectic.

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ature is designer Michelle Morelan's muse, a fact she attributes to growing up in Ucluelet, B.C., on Canada's Pacific Coast, amid driftwood-strewn beaches, mist-clad mountains and an uninterrupted horizon. The designer's Nanaimo, B.C., home pays homage to her muse in its palette, furnishings and fabrics. Even the open-concept layout echoes the expansiveness of nature, and the walls of windows connect the interior to its cliffside perch above Long Lake.

Those windows – or, more accurately, the lake view – were what sold Michelle and her husband, Brian, on the 3,500-square-foot house three years ago. “The view is breathtaking,” says Michelle, who decided to make what was outside both a starting point and a focal point for her design. “I envisioned a palette of light, medium and dark greys with blues and greens because that’s what you see out the window,” she says. “That way, your eye just goes straight outside.”

The colours never overwhelm – they’re subdued, like the coastal landscape draped in fog, and tempered by an abundance of white. “At first I thought I’d go all white, but I don’t have the discipline to be a minimalist,” she admits. Instead, she settled for white walls, sofas and accessories that blend seamlessly together. “They’re just visual texture,” says Michelle. “Your eye doesn’t stop, which is important in an open-concept space.” Michelle repeated the “see-through” trick throughout the main floor: a clear-glass chandelier, glass tables, white china and glassware on floating shelves – nothing visually clutters the space or detracts from the all-important view. →

The Womb-style chair in the living room is Michelle's favourite spot to relax. “When I make myself a latte, turn on classical music and sit there facing the view with my feet up, I’m happy. It’s just beautiful,” she says.

RUG, Salari Fine Carpet Collections.



LEFT A glass cloche set over a pair of wooden birds brings in a breezy beach-house vibe.

Glass CLOCHE, Michelle Morelan Design.

RIGHT The Asian armoire stores platters, candles and many of Michelle's entertaining pieces.

ARMOIRE, The Old Country Market; antique DEMIJOHNS, Heather Ross Natural Eclectic.

BOTTOM RIGHT The desk offers a place for Michelle to display her things. “I like stuff, but pieces have to be pretty or have a purpose,” she says.

BELOW Soft grey sheers add a dynamic element to the living room when the breeze blows. Michelle painted the abstract landscape (in fact, most of the artwork in the home is painted by her).

SOFAS, IKEA; NESTING TABLES, Michelle Morelan Design; TOSS CUSHION (with circle), Provide.

LEFT, MIDDLE A prized 800-year-old Chinese vase was topped with glass and turned into a side table, where Michelle and her husband, Brian, display their favourite books – including one by Betty Lowman Carey, Brian's aunt, who canoed along the entire B.C. coast solo in the 1930s.



RIGHT Downstairs, in Michelle's office, a black-board wall provides a place for note taking, planning and brainstorming, and acts as an artistic wall treatment. Mid-Century Modern-inspired pieces are a great foil to the whimsical items, such as the butterfly toss cushions, in the space.

BOTTOM The living room is grounded by large furnishings like the comfortable deep sofas and by highly textural items, such as the rug, which play off the airy quality of the glass nesting tables and cloches.

OPPOSITE A mini gallery wall of framed artwork in Michelle's office sits above a rotating collage of magazine clippings, photos and more that inspire her designs.



“EVEN THOUGH MY OFFICE LOOKS KIND OF COLOURFUL, THERE’S NO BUILT-IN COLOUR. I CAN EASILY CHANGE IT IF I WANT.”

Michelle also opted for mostly large furnishings. "In a big open space, you tend to take in everything at the same time," she says. "Smaller items stop the eye too often." The furnishings are bold, too, and the mix, eclectic. Chinese, modern, mid-century Scandinavian and traditional-contemporary mingle on all three storeys of the home (the lower level has a guest suite, den and her office; the middle is the master bedroom), so the look is cohesive and no single space looks "too modern" or "too West Coast."

It's a lively combination but not chaotic, thanks to judicious editing and Michelle's preference for natural textures over busy patterns. "I think texture is its own pattern – that's where the nature lover in me shows," she says. Wicker baskets stuffed with wool blankets, a chunky rug underfoot and linen slipcovers enhance visual interest and add pleasing tactile elements in the open-concept space.

The thoughtfulness behind these creature comforts adds something beyond aesthetics, too, something less tangible. Michelle loves her one-of-a-kind dining table not just for its stunning grain, but also because it was milled locally and built from salvaged wood. And a side table in the living room is actually an 800-year-old Chinese vase Michelle's father hauled up into his boat while fishing in the Pacific Ocean – it's prized for the memory it evokes and the story it tells.

Those sorts of meaningful touches give Michelle's home a soulfulness that comes from knowing who she is, where she comes from, and what and whom she loves. Now *that's* natural style.

FOR SOURCES, SEE OUR WORKBOOK



LEFT The Platner table in the light-filled breakfast nook is an original. "I have a high-low rule," admits Michelle, who opted for sofas from IKEA and then splurged on the kitchen and dining tables.

Platner TABLE, Gabriel Ross.

RIGHT The stunning dining table is a testament to Michelle's reverence for the environment: It was made from salvaged maple from the nearby town of Port Alberni.

DINING TABLE, Live Edge Design; DINING CHAIRS, Restoration Hardware; LIGHT FIXTURE, LightForm.

BELOW A huge pantry and bank of drawers were added to match the existing cabinetry. "The kitchen was too small for a 3,500-square-foot house," says Michelle. She created the blinds from ready-made linen drapery panels; they soften the hard surfaces in the room.

STOOLS, Michelle Morelan Design.

OPPOSITE Michelle loves the bank of drawers for its convenience and organization. Shelves painted the same colour as the wall keep the space visually uncluttered, as does the white china and glassware.