

# Made for Each Other

NOTABLE FURNISHINGS  
INSPIRE A MONTREAL RESIDENCE

Architecture by Eric J. Smith, AIA/Interior Design by David Easton  
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Herbert Black commissioned interior designer David Easton to create a residence in Montreal ideally suited to his vast collection of 18th-century English furniture. Eric J. Smith was the architect of the 14,400-square-foot Georgian Revival house. ABOVE: The intricate carvings in the entrance hall's stair are typical of the level of detail in every room. RIGHT: Among the pieces selected for the drawing room is a Gillows of Lancaster rosewood writing table and a pair of Gillows gilt armchairs. The sculpture on the sofa table is a Degas.



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ABOVE: For the dining room, Easton chose decorative paneling made in Paris. At the mahogany three-pedestal table is a set of chairs attributed to John Cobb. A Robert Adam torchère is positioned nearby. OPPOSITE: A mid-18th-century mahogany kettle stand and tea kettle sit next to a Thomas Chippendale armchair in the drawing room.

A fanciful thought: Splendid furniture minds where it resides.

“When I started collecting this stuff 30 years ago, I had no idea that I would ever build a special home to house it,” marvels the Canadian tycoon Herbert Black. “Being in the metal business, aesthetically I was attracted to wood. And what drew me to English versus French was it’s not as ornate—it’s calmer and easier to live with.” For all that, he kept keeping the furniture waiting. Some of these inestimable pieces—chairs, mirrors, torchères, chandeliers (one of them with a twin in the Metropolitan Museum, no less), commodes, desks and tables, by or attributed to such as Chippendale, Grendey, Cobb, Adam and Gillow—languished in storage for years.

The 14,400-square-foot house that he finally built to do justice to this prodigality of prodigies from the past, with their irrefutable truth to form, sits on the highest point in the enclave of Westmount, holding sway above Montreal and the St. Lawrence River and Seaway. “It’s the number-one home in Canada, no question,” Black maintains, “and that’s thanks to David Easton—the guy’s a master, a genius master.”

The collection had of course cried out for the house to be Georgian and to look, moreover, as if it had been built at the same time that the furniture was made. The classically inspired Easton was the perfect professional to deliver such a house, with its formal plan and rooms of a certain scale. “We were creating an envelope for a lifestyle, not to mention the style and the quality of the furnishings,” he says, adding, “Herbert has a real instinct for





quality; he's got what I call radar. I've watched him in action buying furniture."

The project was site-driven, and, since the site was tight and ended in a steep slope, the house was maximized on it. The designer and a longtime collaborator of his, architect Eric J. Smith, can be seen to have taken an inspired reference from David Adler and, perhaps

to a lesser extent, Harry Lindenberg and William Bottomley. The façade is fieldstone, with limestone detailing, and they did a bit of sandblasting to give it a head start on looking old and weathered. From the rear elevation the house even succeeds in looking as if it had evolved out of the mountain itself. Within, the rooms are generously, where not mag-

nificently, proportioned, and they flow gracefully one to the other and out to the terraces, with their doors aligned to create the classic enfilade.

The furniture had driven the architecture—rooms were actually configured with respect to how the requisite pieces would look in them. "Herbert and I would talk back and forth about the scale of a room in re-

lation to the scale of the pieces we intended to put in it," Easton recalls. "For instance, we wanted the drawing room to be step-down, and a major consideration was how would furniture like that look when you were looking *down* at it." Smith adds, "It was all pulled together basically with one voice, which spoke Georgian."

The architectural detail-

**OPPOSITE:** A bay window in the dining room brightens mornings at the breakfast table. Drapery fringe, Scalamandré. **ABOVE:** The library has needlework-covered armchairs with cabriole legs, a drum table, a pair of early-19th-century bronze-and-gilt-brass Vulliamy candlesticks and a Louis XIV rug. Its gilt gesso chandelier, one of a pair (the other is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art), is attributed to James Moore and John Gumley. The oil is a Giuseppe de Nittis.



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ing is superb throughout. The challenge had lain in finding craftsmen to execute it at the highest possible level. "There's just not the food chain, if you will, of young people these days wanting to become ornamental-plaster workers and stone- and wood-carvers," the architect says. Some were found locally; others had to be brought over from France and England. Black himself discovered "a guy up in Shropshire to do all the wide-plank-oak floors for us. We cut down trees over there and then quarter-cut them and had them shipped to Canada, where we let them acclimatize in the basement for two years so they wouldn't warp."

With the exception of the dark-hued library, the palette is expansively, pervasively soft. The drawing room, for instance, has walls upholstered in a restrained-yellow damask, cream-colored woodwork and a carpet that doesn't jump out at you. "There's not anything here that jars," Easton assesses. "Just like in music, there's a rhythm—in the architecture and in the interiors. There's a balance between everything." Indeed, these lines from John Berryman fairly spring to mind: "...you conjure a mansion, / The absolute butlers in the spacious hall, / Old silver, lace, and privacy, a house / Where nothing has for years been out of place." □

OPPOSITE: A Neoclassical sienna and white statuary marble fire surround was chosen for the master bedroom. Hanging above the fireplace is a charcoal drawing by Matisse. TOP: The multiple balconies of the fieldstone-and-limestone rear elevation overlook a steep hillside with lush landscaping. ABOVE: The master bath has honed-marble floors and striped-silk-upholstered walls.