

# BREATHING SPACE

A CRISP PALETTE AND SWEEPING VIEWS  
MAKE A COUNTRY HOME FEEL LIKE ONE BIG EXHALE.

*Text by ALISON GARWOOD-JONES | Photography by DONNA GRIFFITH*





Homeowners Ingrid Oomen and Asad Wali transformed the original cinder-block exterior of their Caledon, Ont., home by covering it with board-and-batten siding and adding a standing-seam metal roof. "I like pure materials. I like how they age and get a patina," says Ingrid, who also planted reams of hydrangeas for further country charm. **Windows, Marvin.**





Ingrid and Asad in the open-concept kitchen of their weekend home. Custom cabinets painted white contrast nicely with the dark-stained pine floors.

**Cabinet design, Qumunicate.**

BELOW: Stainless-steel cabinets break up the expanse of white. A bench reupholstered in mohair adds a touch of luxury. **White pitcher, Angus & Company.**



**“I always wanted to live on a farm,”** says Ingrid Oomen, an avid gardener with a thriving Toronto design business, Qumunicate. So, when she and her husband, Asad Wali, a political consultant, found a potential weekend home an hour outside of the city, he said to her, “Here’s your chance!” Nestled in the rolling hills of Caledon, Ont., with 30 acres of hardwood bush, open fields and four spring-fed ponds, the property was idyllic. But the three-bedroom farmhouse that sat on it certainly wasn’t their dream home; it was a derelict cinder-block bunker. “The windows were cockeyed, the inside was a maze of rooms and there must have been about 30 buckets on the floor catching rainwater,” says Ingrid, who suspects the original structure burned down and was replaced by the block home about 60 years ago. “At first, I thought we’d bulldoze the bunker, but its potential inspired us to save it.” Instead, they transformed the space into a cosy retreat anchored by a sophisticated black and white palette.

The pair had to rethink their living situation a few years ago, when Asad was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. By selling their multistorey house, they were able to buy two wheelchair-accessible homes: one in the city so Ingrid could maintain her business, and this one in the country.

Overseeing the project, Ingrid worked with a team of local tradespeople to open up the 1,200-square-foot space. “It had three tiny bedrooms and you had to go through the first to get to the second and the second to get to the

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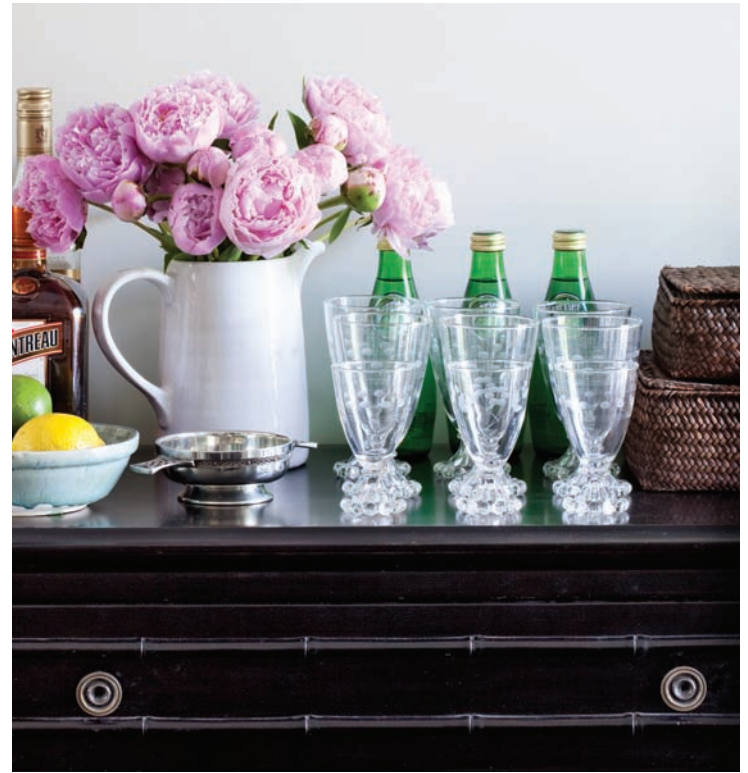






Presiding over the white slipcovered armchairs (all hand-me-downs) and the buff-coloured sofa in the living room is an antique post lamp that Ingrid had rewired into a pendant. The airtight wood-burning marble fireplace not only provides a focal point in the room but heats up the whole house. "The classical lines of the dark fireplace and the rococo flourishes on the white mirror set up a masculine-feminine tension," says Ingrid. *Mercury-glass bottles (on mantel), Angus & Company.*





TOP LEFT: The living room is open to the kitchen, with ample light flooding in from the windows at the far end. The massive butterscotch wardrobe is a Mennonite antique bought at auction 20 years ago. Ingrid revived her parents' old work table for the kitchen by adding a Carrara marble top.

**Glasses, La Merceria; footed glass bowl, cutting boards, Angus & Company.** TOP RIGHT: The home's black and white palette extends to the furniture and accessories. A black dresser with bamboo detailing serves as a bar in the kitchen. The footed glasses were a gift from Ingrid's aunt. **Baskets, Angus**

**& Company; bowl, Elite.** ABOVE LEFT: Ingrid designed a unique retro-inspired vanity using chrome-plated brass tubing and a Carrara marble counter, at the right height for wheelchair access. **Washcloth, drinking glass, pink room spray, Ginger's.** ABOVE RIGHT: In the bathroom, a

simple yet sophisticated design allows for a wheelchair-accessible wet room; the showerhead (*not shown*) is in the centre of the ceiling, just in front of the tub. The limestone floor slopes down to a drain and transitions smoothly across the threshold to darker wood planks. **Towel, bath salts, Ginger's.**



## SIGNATURE STYLE

SECRETS TO INGRID AND ASAD'S COUNTRY-FRESH LOOK.

**1. Keep things fresh and bright** Decorate with a spare hand and use durable pieces: casual white slipcovers can be easily laundered; washable flat paint on walls can be wiped down; and bare floors create a unified look throughout the space.

**2. Update flea-market finds** Ingrid reinvented several hand-me-downs and found items to add an authenticity to the home. She painted chairs, reupholstered cushions and customized an old dresser and work table.

**3. Use classic pairings** A black and white palette always looks sophisticated. Black is used sparingly on key architectural elements and furniture pieces. Varying the tone (warm, grey, yellowish) and finish (glossy, matte) of white paints throughout adds depth.



The wood wainscoting outside the guest bedroom was painted a warm shade of white. The black slate tile floor creates an appealing and practical contrast. Layers of white bedding punctuated with blue-grey pillows make for an inviting room to sleep in. *Green shams, white throw pillow, blue throw, Elte; floor tiles, Olympia Tile; wainscoting, Central Fairbank Lumber.*



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## VIEW

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last day of our trip and my friend Katharina mentioned it over lunch. She said Merci was the home store that Parisians are buzzing about, open only since spring 2009. This large emporium of home, fashion, fragrance, stationery and flowers also includes a library/café. There, you can shop with a conscience. Famous names such as Stella McCartney, Isabel Marant, Yves Saint Laurent and Annick Goutal have come together to fill three floors with an eclectic assortment of great finds — forgoing their profit margins to help fund young women's and children's charities in Madagascar.

*Let's just say,  
if one had all the  
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in Hermès!*

In the library/café, the books are all donated, so you can flip through while you sip your café au lait. My favourite parts of the store are the old-fashioned sewing shop, where you can buy buttons, ribbon and zippers, and the paper shop.

Last stop was the new Hermès store. Let's just say, if one had all the money in the world, it would be tempting to dine, sleep and shower in Hermès! Imagine curling up in a reissue of the classic club chair designed by Jean-Michel Frank crafted in Hermès leather, wrapped in a cashmere Hermès blanket while sipping tea from a china cup after a long ride in your Hermès saddle....

Regardless, this store's sheer beauty will inspire you. There is a flower shop by Baptiste that carries exotics from around the world, a bookstore and even a new line of Hermès carpets.

For more pictures from Paris, go online to my blog on houseandhome.com. **H&H**

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third." They got rid of them all. Adding to the open feel are a number of other accessible features, including bare hardwood floors throughout the main living space and bedrooms, smooth stone surfaces in the two bathrooms (with no changes in elevation between the surfaces) and 36-inch-wide doorways.

Ingrid took snippets of multiple historical styles and threw them on a white canvas, grounding it all with dark-stained pine flooring. "I don't go for any particular feel — if I like it, it's in," she says. And she loves it all: Venetian chandeliers, baroque architecture and over-the-top French gilded mirrors. Ingrid points to the mirror over the fireplace as an example of her style. "It has rococo lines, but I simplified them by spray-painting the whole thing white." She repeated the all-white theme with the principal bedroom's bergere chair, half the dining room chairs (the other half were sprayed black) and the plush armchairs and footstools in the living room. "Painting or covering mismatched furniture or artifacts in white unites the pieces and also makes them more casual and less precious by downplaying any details and embellishments."

Ingrid admits she has always wanted to use lots of colour in her designs but can't bring herself to do it. "I find it hard to live with bright colours, and we'd both rather let nature dictate the tones inside our home. You know how the sky takes on this intense light on the first warm, sunny day in spring? I feel like our white walls reflect these changes. That relaxes me."

Come spring, Ingrid decorates the place with white pillows, soft grey and sage accents and vases filled with lilacs and lavender cut from the property. "But the biggest spring ritual up here is the frogs!" she says. "They're so loud during mating season." On the first warm evening of the season, you'll find Ingrid, Asad and their golden Labrador, Dolce, sitting on the front porch, taking in the rising moon and smiling over the symphony of frogs in surround sound. **H&H**