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A VANCOUVER CONDO RENO SHOWS HOW FAR SIMPLE INSPIRATION CAN GO

TEXT **BARB SLIGL** PHOTOGRAPHY **MARCOS ARMSTRONG** STYLING **HEATHER CAMERON**

Coral, azure, ochre, bottle green . . . the deep colours from an underwater scene in the ocean off the Australian coast. It's a dreamy kaleidoscope that materializes in funky chairs in a swish condo in Vancouver's False Creek neighbourhood.

The seaside vibe is deliberate. It's cheery, cheeky and easy-going, much like the down-under groove. "I want it beachy," was homeowner Heather's renovation directive to designer Valerie Edwards. Sounds simple, but it took a trip halfway around the world for inspiration to hit. The two women happened to travel to Australia within months of

each other, after which Edwards found a piece of bold, multi-hued fabric and showed it to Heather. Her response: "It's the Great Barrier Reef!"

And, while the print may not depict any actual reef reference (it's called Chiang Mai Dragon), it's all about interpretation and inspiration. The upholstered chairs set the stage for the 2,250-square-foot condo. Against their punch of colour, the rest of the open space is like an expanse of sky and sand – from the stark-white kitchen to a floor that Edwards says "looks like the ocean when the tide goes in and out and you can still see the blue on the sand." Then

COLOUR CONFIDENCE "There's got to be major colour in any job I do," says designer Valerie Edwards. "People are not beige, their personalities are not beige." To make this expansive, open-space condo pop, Edwards upholstered sleek chrome chairs in a kaleidoscopic fabric reminiscent of the Great Barrier Reef.





HIGH STYLE, LOW PRICE The high-gloss Ikea cabinetry looks high-end but saves big bucks. **ON THEME** The wire-scraped oak floor reminds homeowner Heather (below) of driftwood; the green-hued granite evokes the ocean.

there's the slab of granite atop the kitchen island, a medley of greens with tinges of gold that further echoes sea currents and phosphorescence. Once inspiration hits, don't harness it; let it flow – especially when undertaking a reno of this magnitude. When Heather and husband Gord purchased the condo, it had been untouched since it was built almost 30 years ago. There was nothing beachy about the space (except for some 1980s-era sandy beige tile and pink toilets) – despite the spectacular view of False Creek's waters. To bring it up to the level of its vista, the condo needed a major overhaul. This is where Edwards rolled up her sleeves. She gutted and stripped the place of walls and a closet, added a couple load-bearing posts and





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— Heather

beams, and combined the entryway, kitchen, dining and living rooms into one free-flowing space. No need to obstruct that view. Now, upon entering the corner unit, you're met with loads of light, walls of windows, and a jaw-dropping city- and seascape.

Next step: bring the ceiling down, rewire the electrical, add pot lights throughout, re-insulate, run a new gas line in (the homeowners wanted a gas fireplace), and bring in a new floor, kitchen and bathrooms. Throughout all this Edwards met

with her out-of-town client just twice. If you're willing to defer to the expert, as Heather did, it makes for a smooth reno. The shared vision – from fabric forward – also helped. "She hit the nail on the head," says Heather. "There wasn't much that she and I didn't agree on."

Edwards took care of all the details – she designed and sourced everything, worked with the structural engineer, served as the general contractor, coordinated the trades and work crew, dealt with the city, met with the building's council

SWEET ENSUITE The master bathroom, made bigger at the expense of a portion of the walk-in closet, now fits a freestanding tub. Other luxe-like additions: the heated floor and shimmering pearlized porcelain tiles.

and placated the strata. "That's what the client's paying for," says Edwards, "to not have the headache of dealing with this stuff."

And the cost for such a top-to-bottom condo reno? "A pretty good rule of thumb," says Edwards, "is that, without furnishing, you're looking at



OPEN SPACES Three rooms combined into one open space, along with 70 pot lights, keep the condo bright. **SMART SAVINGS** In the entry, a bargain-priced cabinet from HomeSense and an Ikea rug mimic the inspirational “reef” fabric. In the master bedroom, the reupholstered bed frame and Ikea drapery panels (sewn into floor-to-ceiling curtains) create the illusion of height.

\$100 to \$150 per square foot, depending on the level of finishing.” Adding high-end finishes and furniture into the mix brings the tally up.

But, still, Edwards has a keen eye for sweet deals. Like a used dining table – with that rustic, beach-house feel – for half price. She’s eco-

minded too: Edwards reuses lumber from framing, and says, “I’d rather pay a guy to pull nails out than pay for brand-new lumber.” The swanky stools for the kitchen island are from the site of the former Olympic Village. The gleaming silver rock-cum-coffee table (made of lightweight fibreglas)

RENO RUNDOWN

Homeowner Heather reflects on the reef-inspired reno

WHY THE RENO? We were looking for a place in Vancouver that was on one floor, spacious, open, and had a view. Our realtor took us to a place that had been on the market a long time and needed lots of work. He told us to keep our minds open. We walked in and said, this is unbelievable – terribly ugly, but unbelievable. After talking with our realtor and designer Valerie Edwards, we put an offer in.

SQUARE FOOTAGE? Didn’t change: 2,250 square

NUMBER OF ROOMS BEFORE AND AFTER? Two fewer rooms after the reno. The kitchen, dining and living rooms are now one open space.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE? Taking out the walls. This entailed having a structural engineer and dealing with the city and strata, but it was more of a challenge for our designer. Val did everything, took control, and didn’t worry us with anything. There wasn’t any grief! **MUST-HAVE CHANGE?** New bathrooms and kitchen. And the wood fireplace had to go. I wanted gas. That was another challenge. It was a lot of money to do that...but we’re really glad we did it.

BIGGEST BARGAIN? Val got great deals on everything. We budgeted twice as much as she spent on furnishings.

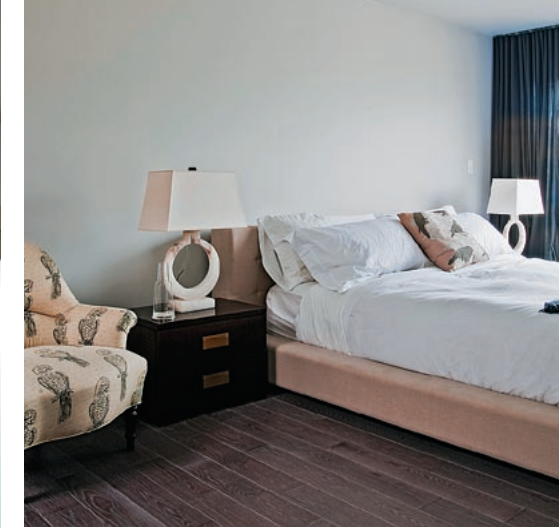
BIGGEST SPLURGE? The kitchen-island countertop. We felt it was necessary to have that “pow” because it’s one of the first things you see when you walk in. And it fits the theme with colours from the bottom of the ocean.

BEST DECISION? Blowing out all the walls. And the wood floor...it reminds me of driftwood. I love it.

WORST DECISION? I don’t think there was one!

HOW LONG DID THE RENO TAKE? Three-and-a-half months.

COST OF RENOVATION? \$200,000.



is a sale find. And the all-white, high-gloss kitchen is Ikea... and looks anything but.

With the Great-Barrier-Reef fabric on the chairs providing the main burst of colour, Edwards kept everything else neutral. Additional pops of colour come from the view. That monochrome Ikea kitchen – complete with slow-close doors, under-mount lighting and stainless-steel kick, all professionally installed like

a top-end kitchen – serves as balance and backdrop, while still looking super sleek.

Of course, the budget-friendly cabinetry allows for a splurge like that green-and-phosphorescent granite countertop on the kitchen island.

Edwards’ advice: Choose where and how to spend the big bucks. Knock down walls to showcase a juicy view. Make a statement with gorgeous granite that’s a piece of art. “There are pieces of slab that look like a Monet painting,” says Edwards. “It’s so fantastic what the earth gives us.”

And throughout the condo, that sentiment is apparent. Nature provides the reno inspiration here, turning an out-dated and forgettable condo into a reflection of the scenery and surf just outside. It’s the Great Barrier Reef – brought home to the West Coast. ■

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