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VANCOUVER ENTREPRENEUR
STEPHEN SUTCH JOINS FORCES
WITH DESIGNER SARAH
RICHARDSON TO BRING HIS
CHIC, URBAN STYLE HOME.

Text and photography by Kim Christie



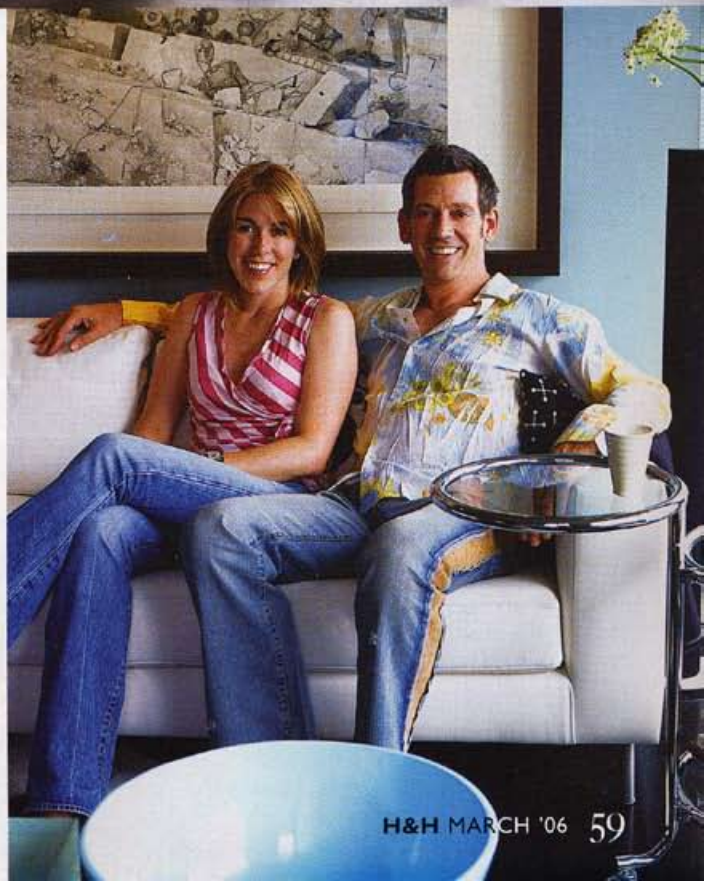
Designed by owner Stephen Sutch and designer Sarah Richardson (bottom right), the living room in this Vancouver condo showcases signature pieces like an Eames La Chaise and classic Panton chairs. The sky-blue wall sets off Stephen's favourite Edward Burtynsky photograph. Sofa, coffee table, cowhide rug, Koolhaus.



If only the cameras had been there when Stephen Sutch first laid out for Sarah Richardson the colour scheme he had in mind for his condominium — a glossy, blood red for the bedroom and a spicy orange teamed with sky blue for the main living area — which they planned to renovate and feature on Richardson's television program, *Design Inc.* "She thought I was on drugs!" laughs Stephen. "But when we actually had the condo painted, she was amazed at how well the colours worked together."

Having met about 12 years ago when they both lived in Toronto, Stephen, owner of modern furnishings store Koolhaus in Vancouver and Calgary, and Richardson, host of *Design Inc.* and principal of Toronto's Sarah Richardson Design, joined forces in the summer of 2004 to renovate Stephen's Vancouver condo. He had been taking advantage of the West Coast housing boom,

OPPOSITE: Viewed from the dining area, two walls painted in sky blue and bold orange have a lively, contrasting effect. They also highlight two important artworks: *Untitled Black and White* by Guido Molinari (left) and Geoffrey Hunter's *Untitled #11*. Set under the glass and steel occasional table, a pair of bookends in the form of large jacks adds a touch of whimsy. Eileen Gray table, bookends, Koolhaus.



In the living room, a corner cabinet made of natural walnut conceals a host of electronic equipment behind a seamless panel. Perforated roller blinds can cover the windows to allow views out but not in. The space's tactile concrete walls, exposed during the reno, offset the clean lines. Sonata trolley table, Panton chairs, Koollhaus; artwork by Guido Molinari.



decorating and re-selling a number of chic, downtown residences (his last residence was featured in *House & Home*, December 2003/January 2004), when he happened upon a project that would require a greater commitment. This 950-square-foot condo in a 20-year-old building had an outdated aesthetic that begged for a complete overhaul. "I've always been excited at the thought of creating something from a shell state," he says. "The last two places I lived in were both brand new when I bought them. I didn't even get to choose the finishes. I was looking for something I could tear apart and make my own."

Elements from a bygone era and rare in most newer Vancouver condos — a window in the kitchen, a whole laundry room (not just a closet), a deck big enough to actually sit out on — and the space's picturesque waterfront view sold Stephen on the place. Having never before undertaken a complete renovation, he called on Richardson to

RIGHT: On the outdoor deck, four curvaceous Panton chairs surround a glass-topped aluminum table, making the dining set look like sculpture. A moulded fibreglass light fixture adds further shape and form. Hero mirror; Koollhaus; Moooi lamp, Klaus by Nienkämper.





ABOVE: In the kitchen, an open shelf outfitted with recessed lighting showcases Stephen's collection of Jonathan Adler pottery. A glass backsplash mounted on a white-painted wall is a sleek, modern element. To enhance the contemporary look, Stephen added a thick stainless steel counter with a moulded sink.

BELOW: The dining room's leggy furniture,

light upholstery (like the white vinyl on the chairs) and blue walls give the space an airy quality contrasted by the richly stained walnut floors. A sliding barn door with a frosted glass panel conceals Stephen's office. Sonoma table, Koolhaus; Stephanie chairs, Sarah Richardson Design; artwork (on wall) by Martha Sturdy.



help. "I've always loved his spirit, his energy and his laugh," she says. "So when he suggested we collaborate, I jumped at the chance."

Despite running his business and travelling back and forth between Vancouver and Toronto with Richardson, who was assisted by Natalie Hodgins (also of Sarah Richardson Design), Stephen and his team took just nine weeks to complete the renovation, which began with gutting the entire space. "I wanted to open it all up, expose the bones and give it an airy, loft-like feel," he says. "This whole project was about taking the past and bringing it into the present." Case in point: the naked concrete shell, previously hidden by drywall, now creates a raw backdrop that sets off his sleek look.

Given the condo's modest square footage, Richardson suggested removing an awkward semi-circular guest bedroom/den, which had a dated



TOP RIGHT: The kitchen's reflective surfaces — the stainless steel countertops and appliances, and glass backsplash — set off the hand-crafted quality of the handsome walnut cabinetry and the rawness of the concrete walls. Painting by Bratsa Bonifacho.



In the bedroom, walls painted in high-gloss red provide bold contrast to neutral elements like the white faux-crocodile vinyl wall covering (behind the bed), white mouldings and dark hardwood floors. A king-sized bed has drawers underneath to store clothing. Floating night tables save space. Bed, lambswool blanket, cowhide pillow, Koolhaus; night tables, Coolwood; tryptic by Michael Batty; artwork (over bed), by Andrew MacKenzie.



In the powder room, the walls are clad in pale blue faux-ostrich vinyl wall covering. An ebony-stained walnut vanity and a simple, modern sink replaced a dated pedestal sink. A '70s mirror adds depth and character. Mirror; Koolhaus; vanity, Coolwood; artwork by Guido Molinari.



glass-block wall jutting out and chopping up the main living area. "Too many people sacrifice important living space in favour of trying to create a guest room, which may be used only a few nights of the year," says Richardson. "I like to maximize spaces and do what makes the most sense for every day." Stephen also expanded the ensuite bathroom, which now features a larger shower and six-foot-long bathtub, by removing a closet, relocating the door and annexing square footage from the adjacent laundry room. "There are things you can change in a condo, and things you can't, and one of the things you can't change is the plumbing," he says. "Where the toilet is, the toilet must stay."

In the resulting open space, Stephen and Richardson used intriguing combinations that further the modern look but add considerable warmth. For example, juxtaposed with the concrete walls and ceiling are dark hardwood floors and natural walnut cabinetry, installed in the living room, kitchen and both bathrooms. "Walnut is my favourite wood. The colour is soft and comfortable, it's modern and goes with

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everything, and I love the grain," he says. "Hints of it in every room lead you to the next space so there is movement throughout the entire condo." Stephen's bold, controversial colour scheme creates a lively, distinctive look. The contrast between the strong colours and white furniture infuses the condo with energy and creates a unique mood. "The colours work because of the large windows and the open feel we created by opening up the space," says Richardson. "Because all the basics are neutral white or wood, he can change the look of the place with a new can of paint any time he wants to."

Stephen's renovation budget quickly became a historical reference. "It cost more because every single thing had to be perfect," he says. The placement of every outlet, phone jack and dimmer switch had to coordinate around his

modern art collection, which he has been accumulating for about eight years. An artist by trade and a longtime art aficionado, Stephen admits most of what he earns goes into buying art. "I don't buy art for investment purposes. I'm a passionate buyer, not a strategic one. I see it, I love it, I need it on my wall."

While Stephen strived for a faultless, well-considered space, Richardson admits their overall approach was lighthearted. "If I had to label his aesthetic, I would call it crisp contemporary with a hint of Miami-modern in the colours," she says. "Stephen likes a stark palette as opposed to a muddy one. He selects pieces for their sculptural artistic value, and he prefers line and form over slouchy comfort. But nothing is too serious with this design. His style at home reflects his style of dress — edgy, cool, hip and fun." ■■■