

Living the dream with Lori Morris

By Shelley M. Black

Based in Toronto and working for jet-setters around the world, Lori Morris wants to reinvent the standard in home design. A self-confessed creative tour de force who embraces a forward-thinking philosophy, Morris strives to deliver a luxury experience for her clients, with an emphasis on every important detail. Backed by a team of more than 25 artists and craftsmen, she believes in challenging the boundaries of traditional design firms.

As the cooler months close in, the busy designer—who has lots of exciting homes and cottage projects on the books—

sat down with Homefront's Shelley Black to talk about the ups and downs of creating your own wine room; her feelings on neo-classical design; and how she can help you "make your home your own."

Q Your hallmark interiors are definitely at odds with today's typically cool grey-and-white sleek aesthetic. What does this mean for clients who are interested in working with you?

Lori: I'm as comfortable with clean contemporary work as I am in French renaissance or English Tudor. It is all about what the client will enjoy. Often, my style is inspired by what the client wants. Whether it is modern contemporary or neo-classical, my approach to any design project is to "do it in detail."

Q What is unique about your approach to design and decorating? Do you have a singular design philosophy?

Lori: At our firm, clients experience genuine, concierge-style service. You are assigned a project manager to work alongside me. I am the person who will very carefully select all of your design finishes, colours, furniture, fabrics and more. I work alongside Julie Ballard, our Creative Director, to design the initial space and finishes. We do custom everything: furniture, millwork and draperies. Our approach is to choose everything for you so that it perfectly reflects you and your interests.

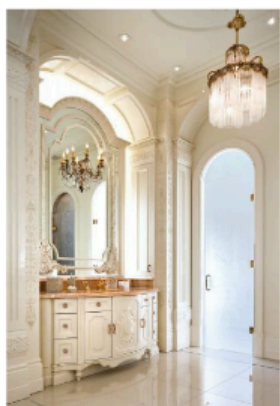


For me, it is always about creating an elegant, sophisticated environment in proportion to the landscape, architecture and scale of the space. I like layers in design—whether in furniture, millwork or fabrics. It starts with how the client lives. It is about a feeling and what you experience in the space.

Q What do you ask of your clients in order for you to be successful?

Lori: We listen and ask questions. I ask them to be as specific as they can about their desired end result. What will the space be used for? What do they want the environment to feel like? Some people hope for a space to entertain, while others don't; some have children or are empty nesters; others collect wine or other valuables that they wish to display. It's about the client, not me.

Q Do you add your magic in the conception stage?





Lori: Absolutely. Right from the very beginning, I meet with clients to establish the feel they want for their lifestyle. Is this to be a main house for a family or a vacation home for a couple? How and when will they live in the space? I'll then set our design parameters. We can produce either full computer-generated drawings or custom hand-drawn visuals so that the clients can envision a three-dimensional picture of their home. After that, we complete the drawings of the house and do what we call "colouring it in."

Q Driving around some of the city's most prominent neighbourhoods, I've seen a lot of your signs. They're on all the right lawns! Are you really personally involved in each project?

Lori: Yes, from start to finish and all the way through the middle. I have a team who will manage the flow and daily details, as well as the construction process. From the creative and design perspective, I handle every element from beginning to end.

Q Worldwide, wine collectors seem to be building ever-grander wine cellars. Are you seeing a trend?

Lori: More and more, people like to entertain at home. Today, they set their living spaces up with far grander entertainment rooms than ever before. As designers, we're now asked for bars and lounges on the main floor. It's seldom that we create main floors that solely have traditional kitchens, living rooms and dining rooms. For instance, we incorporate formal lounges

with wine rooms that are adjacent to the living room. Some are also extensions of sizable kitchens or family rooms.

Q When designing a residential wine cellar, what should our readers consider?

Lori: First, basement cellars are kind of passé. The wine collection has moved upstairs. Today, I'd consider a wine room or a wine lounge. You need to find the most appropriate space to show off your prized bottles and set the

right tone—one that's close to where you are doing your entertaining. The necessary infrastructure takes a bit of organizing. For instance, you need to consult with a mechanical engineer to organize the appropriate cooling system, and think about how many bottles and cases you need to store, what size wine fridges you will need, and how and where you will want to keep the bottles. You also need to select the right finishes. Some finishes create gases that can react negatively with the wines.

Q Why the change from the traditional basement wine cellar?

Lori: The fact is, the wine room is interesting and presents the wine lover with a host of new aesthetic opportunities.

Everyone uses his or her house or cottage differently now. In the past, you would have to go downstairs to get a second bottle of your favourite wine if you ran out during dinner. Now, there is better functionality and enjoyment for the collector. The wine is close to where lunch or dinner is being served.



In some houses, we even do two wine rooms. Recently, we put a really sexy wine room on the main floor of the home, where the wine is prominent and on display. In the basement of that same home, we created a more traditional space for storage and aging.

Q Where in your home do you feel the most content?

Lori: In my bedroom—my whole house is really just one big hallway to my bedroom. In the summer, I also love to spend time on my beautiful terraces.

Q What is valued most in your home?

Lori: I get a great deal of pleasure from my art collection. I enjoy looking at the amazing individual pieces that I have been fortunate enough to collect.

Q You have worked in New York, Montana, Texas, Florida, Muskoka and Jerusalem. How does location influence your design?

Lori: We can and will work anywhere. In fact, our team has access to top tradespeople all over the world. If it is a beach house that the clients have in mind and they want to feel the influence of the sea and the sand, we can work with them to achieve that. Whether our clients have their hearts set on a lake house that blends discretely into the shoreline, or they have spectacular property in the Rockies and they want a chalet for winter skiing, we'll certainly be able to help. The approach is the same wherever we work, and our concierge-style project management system can be utilized anywhere in the world. Geography may have a strong impact on the end results, but my creative translation of my client's dream has the last word. ■

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Shelley Black's career has spanned a unique range of editorial and corporate roles with Flare, Maclean's and BMO Financial Group. She enjoys writing about all forms of design, travel and food.

