



AT HOME IN HAMILTON

When she was looking for a house, little did Caroline Erez realize she would find a place to call home.

WRITTEN BY VICTORIA FORD





A couple of years ago, Caroline Erez was living in Atlanta, Georgia, where she worked for a residential design firm. After the birth of her son, she decided it was time to come back to Canada and began searching for the perfect place to call home. It didn't take her long to see that Hamilton was the right place for her.

"It's so vibrant here," says Erez. "There is so much happening. Art, design, culture. There's a burgeoning art scene and so many antique stores. The natural surroundings are so stunning — waterfalls and organic farms — we've been out more than ever in this past year and we're just starting to explore our new town."

Erez was also drawn to Hamilton's architecture, namely the well-preserved Victorian homes. "We were so lucky to find one and buy it," she says. "It's the perfect space for our family."

Erez loved designing her own home — especially her living room, which, she confesses, is her favourite room to design for clients as well. "The colour palette in our living room is both calming and invigorating," she says. "I placed a number of special pieces of art in the room, ones we've collected over time. The end result is that the space makes me happy, and this is what I want my designs to do for each client. I want them to feel as good in the spaces I design for them as I do in my own home."

Opposite: In the living room, a neutral palette of cream and pale greens is invigorated with touches of antique brass and black. A pair of graphic benches in cerused oak from World's Away sets off the contemporary art above.

Right Top: Curvilinear shapes find repetition in the living room. The modernist chandelier from Visual Comfort complements the mid-century marble and lacquer coffee table below. **Right Bottom:** Caroline Erez at home.



Top Right: In the nursery, deep marine blue walls emphasize the geometry of a recessed niche. Tucked inside, a daybed from Noir Furniture provides a perfect spot for a quiet story.

Bottom Right: A dream-like custom mural of aquatic flora wraps the walls in this tranquil space. The window is dressed in a linen and pom-pom shade from Q Design.

Opposite Page: Brass accents in the finely detailed undulating mirror from Arteriors and vintage shell boxes displayed on the chest lend a touch of refinement to balance the youthfulness of the bedroom.

It doesn't take long to realize that what Erez likes most about her job is the puzzle each design project presents. She likes finding ways to make a space functionally beautiful. And outside of kitchens, family rooms give her the opportunity to dig into this challenge. Of trying to find a way to incorporate a beautiful aesthetic with a functionality that serves, she says, "I like to design family rooms because clients spend a lot of time there. It's a space where everyone has an opinion." That it has to work for all members of a family — and serve a variety of functions — ignites her creative energy. For Erez, design is all about the details — and getting them right.

The result is designs that are a blend of sophistication and timelessness. Of beauty and comfort. And for her, the secret lies in scale.

"I think that, visually, a space needs to make sense and you need to feel good in a room," Erez explains. She credits this to her background in fine art history. "It really puts an emphasis on composition and I find that is where my mind goes. I think scale is one of the most important things in good design — both in terms of the house and the homeowners. It doesn't make sense to have a large wing chair in a large room for a petite client."

By focusing on scale, Erez creates spaces that clients feel comfortable in. "You don't want a house to become a stage," she says. She strongly dislikes spaces that look like showrooms, where everything matches. These spaces become cold and impersonal. She knows that incorporating a mix of things that are important to clients and their families is necessary in telling the story and creating a home. "Personal style varies, it's a personal trademark. So I work with my clients to find pops of colour and incorporate texture and warmth to create a home that they feel comfortable in and want to welcome others in as well."

Erez acknowledges that clients come to her because they like her style, but through conversation — and lots of it — she seeks to understand what it is her clients need to make their space uniquely their own. "Style is so personal and unique to each of us, but functional design is what makes a space really work for you."





“It’s so important to really listen. Sometimes we designers can overlook listening. But that’s the key,” she says. Her second tip? Getting to really understand how her clients live and function in their spaces. To do this, she works to make sure as many of these conversations as possible happen at the clients’ homes. “This allows me to see how they interact and move about their space. I find I get focused on the minutiae on how people live, but this is so important. It really impacts how I approach the design of their space.”

For Erez, understanding how clients get dressed in the morning and whether or not they put their feet up on the couch when watching TV impacts the functionality of design. And she wants to make sure she gets this right. Only once she has these details does she move on to the personal aesthetic of the space.

“I work together with clients to get a feel for what they like,” she says. “I prompt this by showing a lot of examples of other spaces, colours, textures and palettes and get their innate response. I explore the psychology and function for rooms. I look a lot at art that clients respond to and try to find pieces that trigger conversation and have meaning for each client. From there, I work with the dimensions and compositions of each room, taking in scale and proportion, and then incorporate all the aesthetic conversations to build out the overall feel of the design.”

By helping homeowners immerse themselves in the design process, Erez creates spaces that they can identify with. “I encourage clients to look about and engage in the design around them,” she explains. “Friends’ homes, magazines, hotels — design is everywhere.”

This year looks to be an exciting one for Erez. While not one to get caught up in trends, there are a few that are really speaking to her. Case in point: The Marie Kondo trend. “It’s the way I design anyways — I have an abhorrence to meaningless tchotchkes, so I always minimize surplus, so this trend helps me,” she laughs. “I believe that clients will find more joy in having only a few things they really love versus a smattering of a few things you sort of love.”

She’s also really drawn to the growing trend of micro-apartments.

“I’m fascinated by the creative challenge of how to get insanely small places to work and be chic,” she says. “These spaces showcase some really creative solutions. And I believe that these principles can translate to larger rooms — they can be cross-functional. I really love this.”

Creating beautiful spaces that clients love is her favourite part of her job. So, where does she find the right pieces? “I like checking out 1stDibs,” she says. “I can often find pieces that really set off a room there. I also like West Elm to find affordable finishing touches.”

Erez and her family continue to explore Hamilton. She’s finding plenty of inspiration in the city — there’s always something to pique her interest and bring into a new design challenge. One of her favourite local shops? Michael Thomas Antiques on Dundurn Street South. “The owner, Michael Thomas, really curates to my tastes.

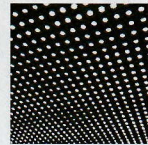
“A happy place for me on a weekend is to grab a coffee and go to a gallery — I find so much inspiration there,” she says. “Hamilton is wonderful for that, it’s so inspiring to me.”

Getting to Know Caroline Erez



What’s the #1 played song on your phone?

“Myth’ by Beach House. I put it on after my kids are in bed. It always calms me down and puts me in my happy place.”



Where’s your favourite place for a meal out in Hamilton?

“Earth to Table: Bread Bar on Locke Street. It’s super yummy, friendly staff, great food and close by my house.”

Favourite movie?

“The Royal Tenenbaums still, after all this time.”



What’s your favourite movie interior?

“There are so many I think are great. *The Great Gatsby* had some fantastic sets. We’re watching a German show called *The Same Sky* set in the ‘70s that has an amazing German contemporary thing going on.”

Most iconic design piece of the last century?

“Well, maybe not the most, but I love the Charlotte Perriand’s lounge chair.”



If money were no object, what would you buy?

“[Laughs] A house in the south of France — because why not?”

What’s your favourite way to while away a Sunday?

“Reading food blogs and drinking coffee.”