

STREET SMARTS

SEEKING MORE SPACE AND A CONNECTION WITH THE CITY, AN ARTIST AND A DESIGNER TURN AN OLD TORONTO STOREFRONT IN DUNDAS WEST INTO A HOME AND STUDIO.

By Alex Bozikovic
Photos by Naomi Finlay



Architect Tamira Sawatzky and artist Elle Flanders (left) get an awfully good view of their busy Toronto street from their office and dining room. The table is by Made, the sneaker-inspired Shoe Toss pendants are by Jeremy Hatch of Ricochet Studio, and the laser-cut photo on the wall is by the couple's collective art and design practice, Public Studio. ▶



The living room is five steps down from the kitchen and office space and features textured black slate tile from Olympia Tile, Voyage Immobile sofas with Farniente collection upholstery (a wedding present from Flanders's mother) by Roche Bobois, and a rug from Turkmenistan the couple picked up in Jerusalem. The sliding glass doors are by Loewen and the glazing above is by Inline Fiberglass. Sawatzky relied on Wayne Arsenault for the custom millwork and carpentry.

If the sign out in front of this aging Toronto facade is any indication—it reads “Star Sheet Metal”—you’d think that it’s just another industrial storefront. But when the blinds are up, you’ll see the couple who lives there making art, designing buildings, or, just as often, making dinner. The century-old structure is the home and workplace of architect Tamira Sawatzky and her wife and collaborator, artist and filmmaker Elle Flanders. In 2011, they were on the hunt for a building big enough to house themselves, their joint art practice, and individual businesses, plus an apartment for a tenant. What they found on busy Dundas Street West offered all of that—and also a chance to try a novel way of living in Canada’s biggest city.

Sawatzky: We decided we wanted a commercial building—and we wanted a space that was in the worst possible shape. This one was a complete disaster, but it had the right feel. It had the old sign, which we kept, and once we saw this room at the back, what is now the living room, I think the project sort of jelled. The building is about 75 feet long. Obviously, the office-studio was always going to go in the front, but at the back the place becomes quite quiet. When we’re back there, we don’t really hear anything. Upstairs, in a way, it’s more traditional—bedrooms and bathrooms.

Flanders: Partially, this is an experiment in living right on the street. We know we’re not in Amsterdam, but it’s an interesting trial. We usually open the blinds at night and engage with what’s outside. ▮



MAKE IT YOURS

▲ Counter Intuitive Sawatzky designed the living room wall out of Ikea components: one-inch Lagan butcher block countertops and inexpensive Ekby

Lerberg brackets. She also used pieces of the strong and attractive countertops for built-in shelves in the upstairs lounge as well as for trim in the kitchen. ikea.com



In the second floor lounge (above), a Flex sleeper sofa in Gravel from CB2 sits opposite an antique Chinese coffee table Flanders inherited from her grandmother. In the master bedroom (left) the couple opted for Artemide Lighting: Vintage Eclisse table lamps by Vico Magistretti hang over the nightstands and a Tizio table lamp by Richard Sapper rests on a side table. The lounge chairs are vintage finds, and the rug is a Bedouin design purchased in Jerusalem. Maira wallpaper from Wallpaper From the 70s adorns the guest bathroom (below).

▼ **Lath Lady Lath**
When they knocked down several interior walls, Sawatzky and Flanders were left with tons of lath—the thin, irregular strips of softwood that provided the base for wall plaster. With the help of a demolition contractor, they sorted out the cleanest pieces to reuse. The couple clad the box on the second floor that contains their bathroom and closets with the lath, nail-gunning each piece to the walls.

Sawatzky: As things progress to the weekend, we notice the evenings become noisier, and then, Sunday, everything shuts back down. You're very in tune with the rhythms of the city here. And it's worked well as a really social space. We've had way more people over—lots of impromptu get-togethers. We were giving this little talk at a gallery, which was down the street, and we said, "Everyone just come over afterward," and they did.

Flanders: And even while we were waiting here for them, a friend of mine was going to the restaurant down the

block. He knocked on the window, and then we said, "Come on in!"

Sawatzky: Everything here is long and narrow. You can't escape that. I think it was clear right away that we were going to go with this linearity. In the kitchen, for example, I thought, Let's load up this one island as a machine that houses everything. It has the cooktop, it has the dishwasher, the sink—and everything around it has to be left as circulation space that you can move through. It's a huge worktop, but I feel like it was the only way to make sense of this narrow space. ▮





If we had an opportunity to open up, it was at the back, where things widen out, and we have a view and a connection to the outdoors.

Flanders: I think we're both interested in history: not the history of this particular place, but the concept of living in a changing space. This wall has pencil notes from the guy who owned the sheet metal shop. You could just almost see Jack, this guy on the phone, going, "You want it 15 inches wide..." I like living with that kind of history in here.

Sawatzky: We were very happy to find these opportunities where we could to let the old building come through. There is a raw quality to a lot of these details. We've got bulbs screwed into ceramic bulb holders that are \$2 each. And the ceiling is left exposed; you save a lot of money doing that, and I think we liked the idea of letting that part of the building reveal itself.

Flanders: I was hoping to find a time capsule, but we didn't. But we did find the original shop owner's daughter; she's going to come over with her daughter and tell us about the building and the sheet metal business. ■■■

▼ **Appliance Garage**
To keep vases, dishes, and small appliances handy but off the countertop, Sawatzky designed two niches within a wall of deep cabinets. Inset outlets supply power; butcher block lines all sides; and Plexiglas doors provide hits of bright orange. plexiglas.com



In the kitchen (top), the continuous kitchen worktop and table are made of marble from Caledonia Marble. The pink Tamatik dining chairs are by Connie Chisholm and are from the Canadian design shop Made. The Blinding Love pendant lights are by Periphère, which has shops

▲ **Well Wrought**
The iron rails were inspired both by screens the couple had seen on their travels in the Middle East and by the ornate wrought ironwork favored by their Portuguese neighbors. Barzel Ironworks fabricated the banister to Sawatzky's design by slicing up iron pipe, welding it, and painting it. railings-toronto.ca

▼ **The Bestå Times**
The couple has a large collection of cookbooks. To provide storage for them in the kitchen—and also seating—Sawatzky topped narrow bookcases (Bestå units by Ikea) with custom-made cushions, upholstered in gray Circa fabric by Knoll Textiles purchased from Modern Fabrics. knolltextiles.com



in Montreal and Toronto. Plastic World, a local dealer, custom-cut the Plexiglas for the storage cubby (above) which sits beneath a photo by artist Chris Curreri. The bookshelf-cum-bench (right) was custom upholstered by Tina Morgan Designs.