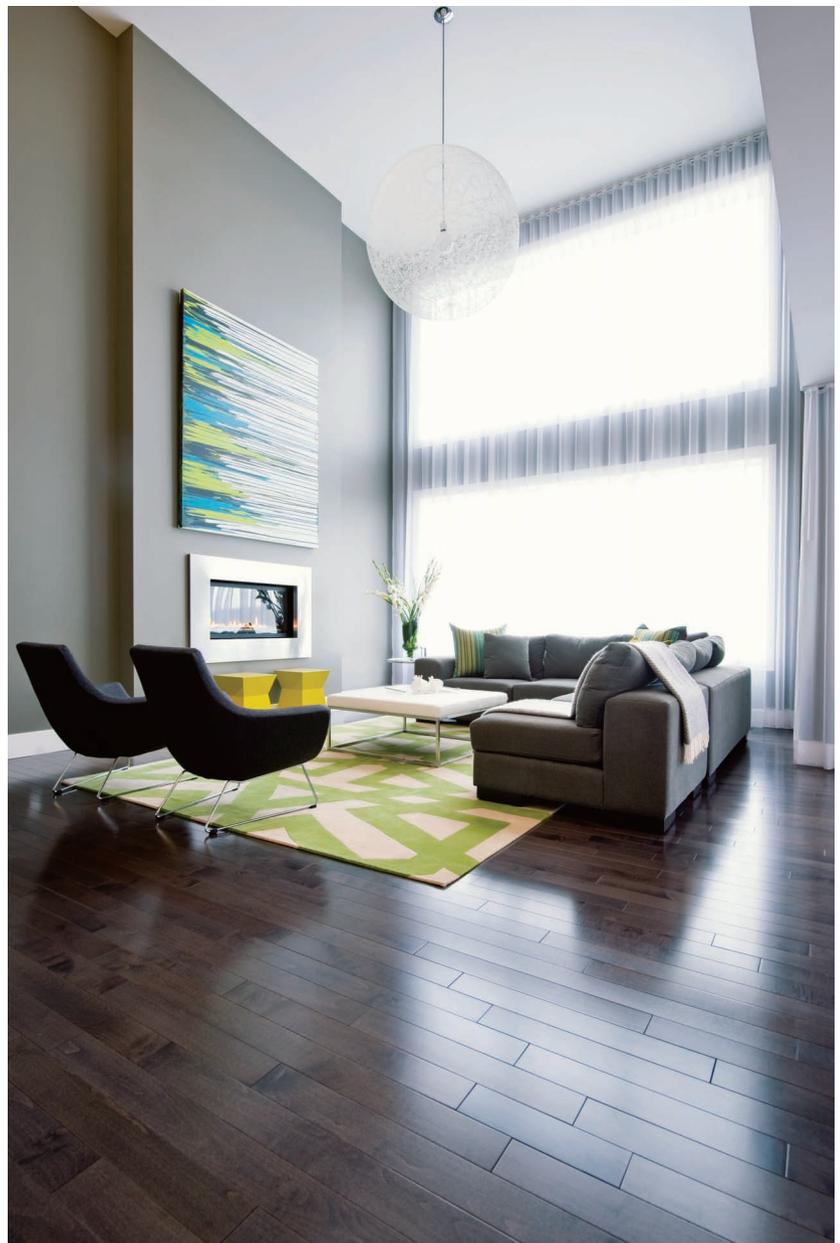




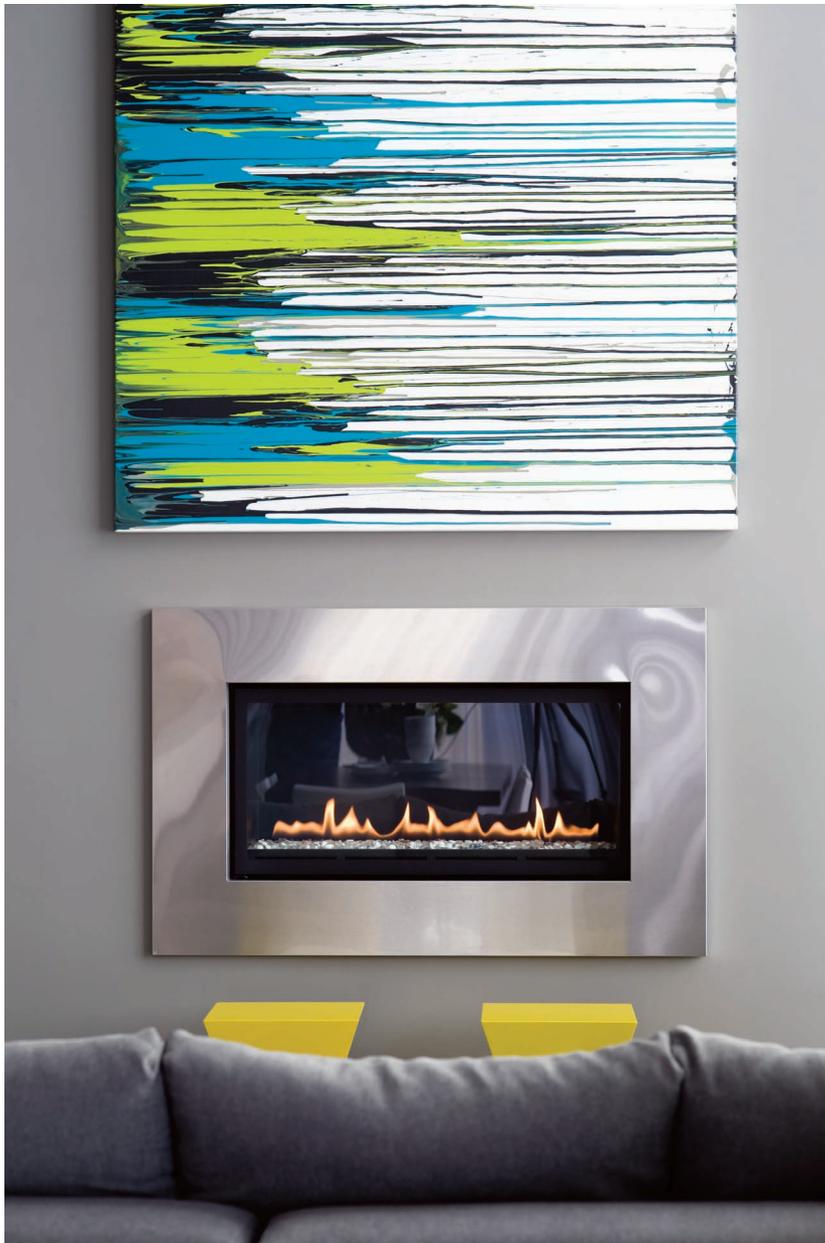
**Above:** Designed by Calgary-based designer Alykhan Velji and hand knotted in Nepal, this rug combines traditional and modern elements.

**Right:** Removing some walls widened the main floor den space into an open and airy living room.



# Redefining the S-Word

For some, the word “suburban” has come to be synonymous with soulless and styleless, but this modern home reimagines suburban style



**Left:** A colour palette of neutral greys is punctuated by bright green accents.

**Below:** A wide hallway upstairs creates a space for a sleek black console piano.

**Bottom:** The stainless steel handrail creates a bold graphic look.



**There are things** you expect to find in the suburbs. Green lawns. Oak trim. Bonus rooms. It's a land where safe design often rules the roost, and creating broad appeal is the goal.

Iman Lalji's family home stands out from the crowd, not only because of its bold, modernist decor, but because it challenges the notion of suitable suburban design.

Backing onto a northwest golf course, the 1,960-square-foot two-storey house serves as home base for Lalji and her parents, as

well as a part-time residence for her grandmother. Lalji explains that, while it is culturally accepted within the East Indian community for several generations to share one home, it is unusual at her house for everyone to be there at the same time. She and her parents travel frequently.

The house, which was built in 2002, appealed to Lalji right away because the location was good, it had a double, attached garage, a great view and a workable space. Lalji says the family found it after narrowly missing out on what they

thought was their dream home. But, when she previewed this house, she knew immediately that she could turn it into exactly what they were looking for.

Despite the fact that the home was less than a decade old, Lalji started a major renovation in November 2008. In addition to replacing the kitchen and all of the bathrooms, Lalji's plan included eliminating a third upstairs bedroom to make way for a walk-in closet and expanded ensuite in the master bedroom used by her parents. She also widened a hallway at the top of >>>



the stairs to create a landing skirted by a sleek, stainless steel handrail. The space is now a showcase for the family's black console piano.

On the main floor, Lalji had the walls of a narrow entrance removed to widen an open den beside the entry, and she closed in an awkward walkthrough pantry to create more space for a main-floor laundry off the garage. Lalji also reconfigured the walkout basement to include an office, media and rec room, a bathroom, as well as a spacious bedroom for herself.

The entire project took a year to complete, including five months Lalji took off work as a realtor to focus on the renovation and act as general contractor. However, she didn't go it entirely alone. Lalji hired Calgary-based interior designer Alykhan Velji to help her execute her plans.

Velji says the two found common ground right away. "She wanted to create an ultra-modern feel," he says.

Lalji wanted an open-concept design. She's not a fan of homes with formal living and dining rooms, because she says they're not popular for resale and few people really use them, except when company arrives. "You own the house," Lalji says. "You deserve to sit in the nicest room and



**Top left:** The powder room is the perfect space to go bold with wallpaper. This room still stays consistent with the home's colour palette.

**Top:** Rather than a typical chandelier, Velji used single pendant Bocci lights hung at different heights the span of the dining room table.

**Above:** Bold wallpaper in the office creates drama while white furniture and a glass-top table keeps the room open and airy.

**Opposite:** With an open concept kitchen it is especially important to have sufficient storage space as everything is visible to guests.

**"You deserve to sit in the nicest room and eat on the nicest dishes. When guests come, you just extend the table."**



eat on the nicest dishes. When guests come, you just extend the table.”

Velji sees many clients moving in this direction. He says the trend toward open-concept living keeps growing in popularity, and for good reason. “Open-concept homes feel a lot bigger,” he says. “That’s why people like them so much; they create more visual space.”

Lalji agrees. “People are always surprised when I tell them the square footage of this house,” she says. “Everyone thinks it’s bigger than it is.”

In addition to knowing what type of space she wanted, Lalji also had ideas to help keep the budget manageable.

She made careful decisions on where to spend and where to splurge. For example, she shelled out for door hardware and hinges, but opted for basic wood doors she could paint herself. She chose inexpensive sinks and tile for the bathrooms, but paired them with top-quality hardware and faucets. Finally, all of her closet interiors came from Ikea, but the home’s feature lighting was ordered from Italy.

Combining expensive and more modestly priced items can be done for many decor styles, >>>

## Spend vs. splurge

Decorator Alykhan Velji says he often sees homeowners spend most of their budget on a renovation, leaving little for the decor and furnishings. If you are working with a limited budget, he recommends these ways to stretch it.

### ACCESSORIES CAN WAIT

Velji recommends buying key pieces and then refining the space later. “Spend on your kitchens and bathrooms. Spend on your large furniture: your bed, your sofas, your dining room table,” he says. “Those are pieces you want to invest in, because you are going to use them every single day.”

### MAKE STATEMENTS YOU CAN CHANGE

Velji and homeowner Iman Lalji opted for wallpaper to create personality in many rooms. “Wallpaper is a great way of introducing colour and texture to a house,” says Velji. He adds it’s also relatively inexpensive to change when you’re ready for a new look.

### UNLEASH YOUR INNER PICASSO

In the Lalji home, the feature artwork above the fireplace was created by Lalji and Velji in his garage. “She brought a big canvas over and we took some paint colours and experimented,” Velji says. Lalji also created some of the other artwork in the house on her own.

Foothills Hospital Cabaret

SNC Lavalin Inc. presents

# The Pointer Sisters



February 18, 2010 – 6:15 pm  
BMO Centre at Stampede Park

For more information  
on sponsorship opportunities  
or to purchase tickets visit  
[www.thetrust.ca/cabaret](http://www.thetrust.ca/cabaret)  
or call 403-943-0619.

Headliner sponsor:



SNC • LAVALIN

avenue  
MAGAZINE



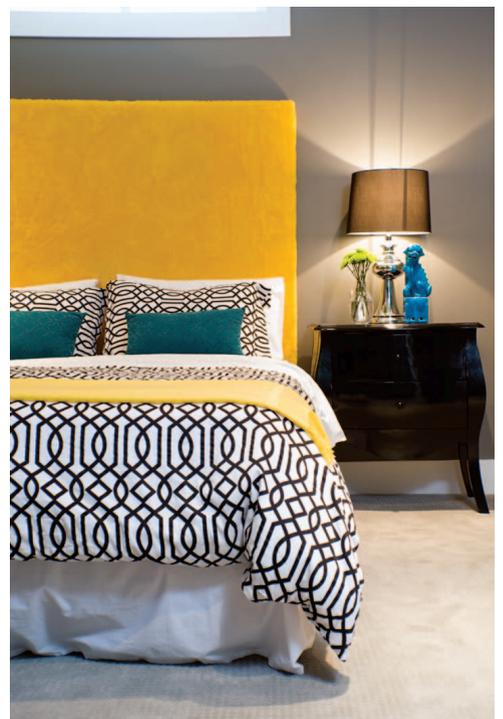
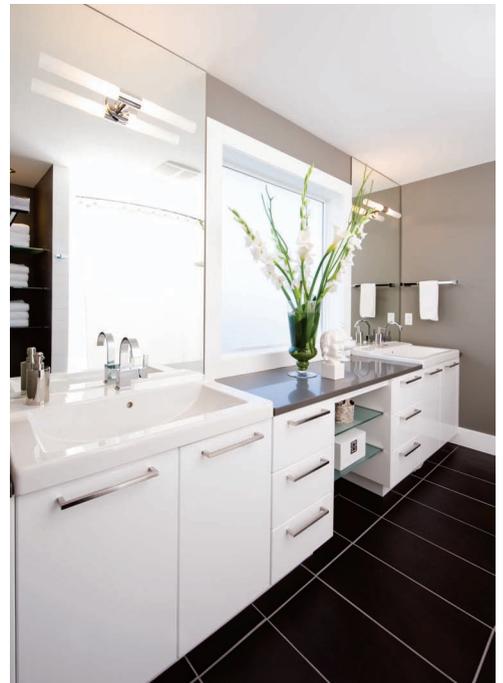
Calgary  
Health Trust



**Above:** Purple accents, mirrored side tables and an upholstered headboard add glamour to the master bedroom.

**Top Right:** White high-gloss cabinets like those in the kitchen are carried through to the master ensuite.

**Below Right:** Dramatic colour choices for Lalji's grandmother's room create a fun space with some touches of whimsy.



Velji says. When it comes to design, he says there really are no rules about what you put together, although he believes a trained eye is often better at identifying what works. “Most people are so hung up on rules and are scared to break them,” he says.

Lalji says one of the rules she broke in this renovation was eliminating one of the upstairs bedrooms that, had it remained, would have served as accommodation for guests. In settling the discussion, Lalji made a formal analysis of the number of nights the family hosted out-of-town guests during the past four years. The answer: an average of two nights per year.

She convinced her parents, and specifically her father, who also has a real estate background, that they would be better served day-to-day by having a significantly larger master bedroom and putting up overnight guests at a hotel. Her parents eventually agreed, and one of the home's small upper bedrooms became a spacious dressing room.

Lalji's parents weren't the only ones she had to convince about some of her decisions. She says many of the trades people she hired also questioned the decision to remove the home's rela-

tively new materials and finishes. “We actually reused the materials, almost every single bit, in a rental property we were renovating,” she says.

Even then, it wasn't all smooth sailing. At one point, Lalji feared the Moooi pendant lamp from Italy wasn't going to make it into the home — it wouldn't fit through any of the doors. “The electrician refused to bring it in because he couldn't guarantee it wouldn't break,” says Lalji. She and a friend eventually squeezed the oversize epoxy and fibreglass sphere — with great care — through the front door. It now hangs in the living room.

Lalji stresses she'd advise real estate clients looking to make similar changes to spend more cautiously if they intended to resell. However, the level of customization made sense for her family.

“When I was renovating this house, my priority was my parents,” says Lalji. “I said, ‘This is the house they are going to be in for the rest of their lives. They deserve something nice.’”

Velji agrees it was a unique project. “You wouldn't normally think of a house in that area having such great interiors. These are builder-grade homes,” he says. “It just goes to show you what you can do from a cookie-cutter house.”

**“Most people are so hung up on rules and are scared to break them.”** —Alykhan Velji