

## Passion project

From a Toronto recording studio to a West Coast cabin-cum-writer's room, our annual roundup of Canada's best architecture and interiors illustrates how to live creatively at home

Matthew Hague | The Globe and Mail | Published May 13, 2026

Artist studio by Williamson Williamson.

Recording studio by Superkül

Hidden down a Toronto alleyway is a discreet hub for making music



The Superkül

team were tasked by their client to create a laneway recording space with an unexpectedly homely approach to acoustics. Doublespace Photography/Supplied

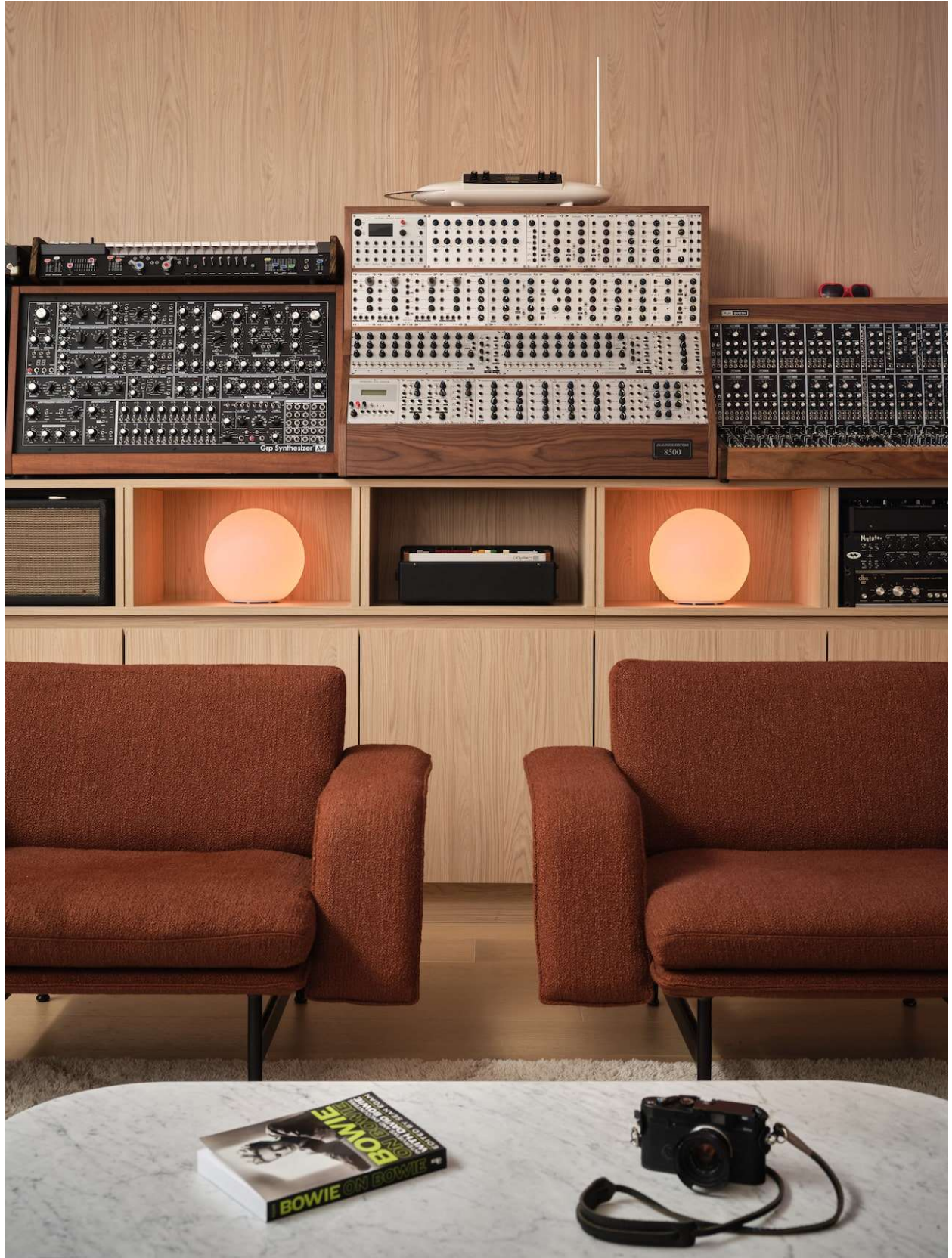
For a Toronto recording studio in a backyard laneway suite, architects Kevin James and Meg Graham of Superkül faced an unusual request. Their client, an experienced record producer who has worked with some of the world's biggest labels, asked for a space without conventional acoustics. "He just loves the sound and the feel of a real space," James says. "He uses books for sound dampening instead of traditional baffles."

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The 1,100-square-foot structure is kitted out in other ways. There are three mic hookups, including one in the washroom (everyone, it turns out, does sound better in the shower). An 18-foot-tall feature wall, wrapping from the ground floor around a mezzanine up to the second level, has space to display 34 guitars. A custom rosewood desk from Studio Archive is used for writing music, and 1970s-style loungers are for relaxing between jam sessions.



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Doublespace Photography/Supplied

Because its A-list visitors need privacy, windows are minimal. However, a 12-foot skylight above the stairs washes the space in light, as does a long ribbon window cut close to the ground on the first floor, with ankle-level views of the garden. "Every inch was considered for the client's needs," Graham says. "We looked at the overall design as an instrument for him to make music."

Tiny cabin by Bidgood

One West Coast movie-making couple finds inspiration in a minimal footprint

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Boat interiors inspired the efficient space planning of this B.C. cabin down to the smart storage hidden below dining benches and within the built-in sofa. Mary McNeill Knowles/Supplied

As documentary filmmakers, Niobe Thompson and Linda Chang work in a technology-driven industry: lights, cameras, laptops. Yet when the couple needs to pen a script or a treatment, they often do so at their cabin, 45 minutes from their home in Victoria, B.C. “There’s no internet connection,” Thompson says. “You have to go to the lakeshore to catch a cellphone signal.”

The space is small – about 260 square feet, plus a 100-square-foot loft where the couple sleeps. It was carefully designed by Victoria-based interiors firm Bidgood to support both living and working. The dining banquette doubles as a writing area. The built-in sofa is a great perch for

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

reading and research. In every conceivable nook, there are hidden drawers and cubbies for storage. “We told the carpenters to approach it like a sailboat,” Thompson says. “It’s a tiny structure that needs to be highly functional.”



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Mary McNeill Knowles/Supplied

Post-productivity, the couple entertains often. There are two 100-square-foot bunkies on the property for guests. “I love seeing my kids and my friends’ kids up here,” Thompson says. “It’s so important for young people to spend time in nature. It inspires their imaginations. After all, it’s what we adults are doing out here, too.”

Artist studio by Williamson Williamson

A professional painter creates a light-filled oasis for her personal practice



Overlooking Lake Ontario and the Scarborough Bluffs, artist Kelly Palmer’s lofty atelier draws in the light that painters value. Doublespace Photography/Supplied

As the head scenic artist for the National Ballet of Canada, Kelly Palmer paints backdrops to bring dance performances to life. In her off-hours, she continues to paint – but for herself. “I do a combination of landscape and abstract paintings,” she says. Her drive, in part, comes from her newly built home in Toronto’s east end, which has an atelier tailored to her creative needs. “I can’t wait to get into my studio,” she says. “It’s actually inspired me, pushed me to get going.”

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Doublespace Photography/Supplied

Some of the magic of the space comes from the light. A consistent, even glow washes down from a north-facing clerestory above Palmer's desk. A brighter southern shine comes through windows in an adjacent living room, which also has views of the Scarborough Bluffs and Lake Ontario. "I'm actually doing a few paintings of the Bluffs," Palmer says.

Calibrating the light and views was a careful endeavour. Palmer's architects, Shane and Betsy Williamson of Williamson Williamson, made many virtual models that Palmer toured via a virtual reality headset. "We wanted to show her that the space and the light would be appropriate for her in all weather, in all seasons," Shane says. Adds Palmer: "It's better in real life."

Basement event space by Atelier Midi

With a few quick changes, this subterranean room becomes dinner party central

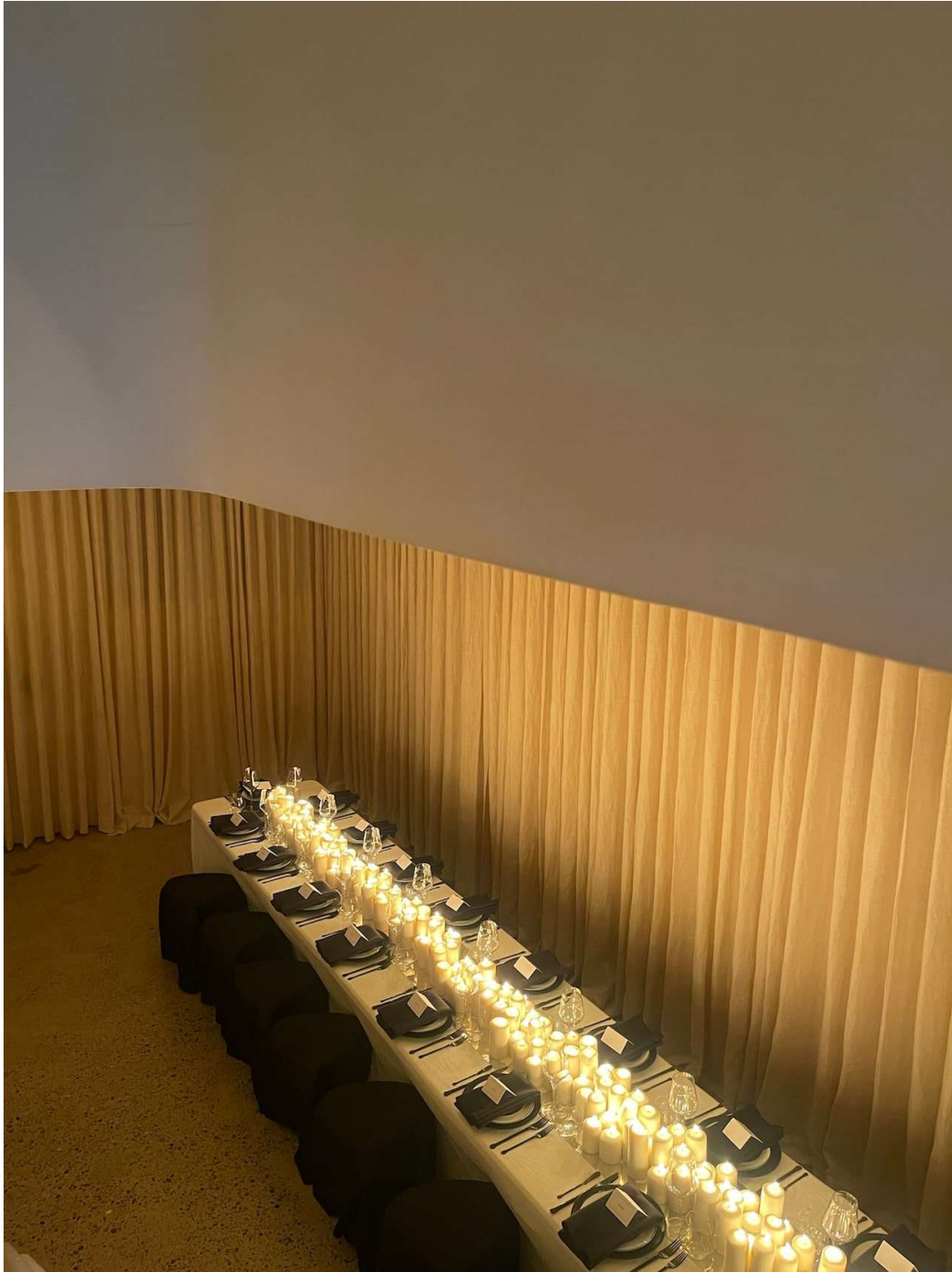
# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



On the lower level of this Toronto home, interior designer Nicolas Diaz transforms his workplace into a swish dinner party spot draped in fabric and candlelight. Erin Leydon/Supplied

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The basement of Nicolas Diaz's Toronto semi has Clark Kent versatility. By day, it is where Diaz does his duty as the co-founder of Atelier Midi, a new interior design firm. On a waxed aluminum chair from Montreal's Found, Diaz sits at a travertine desk by a library wall lined with design books. Although subterranean, light shimmers off the Venetian plaster walls, coming down from a skylight punched in above the open staircase.



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Erin Leydon/Supplied

But by night, the space transforms. The desk gets tucked away in a nearby gym-turned-storage area. Floor-to-ceiling pleated linen drapes, hung from a discreet track, pull over the library and encircle much of the room. It's all very theatrical, perfect for both professional and personal events: product launches for private clients (such as a recent gathering for Normy, a home textiles company) and friends' birthday parties. A long, skinny table fits right down the middle of the diminutive, 13-foot-wide space, seating more than 20.

Diaz-designed decor, such as flower-laden chandeliers, sets the mood. "I love to experiment," Diaz says. "I see the basement as a useful tool. It's taught me a lot about what works and what doesn't when creating different experiences."

Reading nooks by RobitailleCurtis

A pair of avid readers ensure they have lots of cozy spots to enjoy their library



With views of the Laurentians, this cottage includes upholstered daybeds for reading with windows that open wide to invite the landscape in. ADRIEN WILLIAMS/Supplied

Recently, architect Andrew Curtis and his partner, landscape architect Sophie Robitaille, built a lakeside cottage north of Montreal for two engineers. "They are intellectual people," Curtis says.

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

“They don’t own a television.” Instead, they have a serene great room with views of the Laurentian Mountains.

The space accommodates living, dining and cooking – as well as lots of reading. “There are two reading nooks,” Curtis says. Both are nestled into walnut-lined window bays. “In summer, the windows are open all the time because the owners prefer fresh air to air conditioning,” he says. The nooks sit opposite library shelves stacked with books, next to a teak dining table the homeowners picked up during a work stint in East Asia. “They are well-travelled.”



ADRIEN WILLIAMS/Supplied

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Currently, the owners live in England, where they met at Oxford and both rowed on the Thames (the front door of the cottage has a handle shaped like an oar). “But the cottage is where they will retire,” says Robitaille, who ensured that almost no trees were felled during construction to keep the property and the views natural. “She was raised in the area. The Laurentians are a beautiful place to come home.”

Hobby House by Denegri Bessai Studio

Instead of a traditional floor plan, this home is configured around creative spaces



To create room for a couple’s extensive list of pastimes, architects Maria Denegri and Tom Bessai worked a sewing space and a speakeasy-style backlit cocktail bar into their three-storey home. Rémi Carreiro/Supplied

Underused, if ceremonial, spaces are a common feature of many abodes – the dining room entered only during the holidays, the living room dusted off for special guests. When architects Maria Denegri and Tom Bessai, who run Toronto’s Denegri Bessai Studio, were planning a new home in the city, the homeowners, a young couple with no kids, specifically asked them to avoid anything of the sort.

Instead, the pair gave the designers a highly detailed spreadsheet, all colour-coded, outlining the spaces required to reflect their various passions including sewing (she made her own

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

wedding dress) and craft cocktails (a hobby he picked up during the pandemic). “It even included notes on the music they would probably be listening to and the moods they wanted to feel,” Denegri says.



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Rémi Carreiro/Supplied

The A-type approach led to a singular home. There is currently only one sleeping space, a third-storey aerie that looks like a swish hotel suite. Otherwise, there are designated zones for crafting (a second-floor studio that could be converted into kids' accommodation) and a screening room. The most dramatic space is the basement, a black-walled den with a bar. "It's hidden like a speakeasy," Bessai says. "It's also next to the gym and sauna." Balance, like a hobby, is always important.

Viewing gallery by Hoyles Architecture

Above a kitchen, an observatory offers endless vistas of wild Newfoundland



Playing on East Coast saltbox house design, this Newfoundland home is topped by a space for observing wildlife and dramatic weather. JANE BROKENSHERE/Supplied

Madison, Wisconsin, is a pretty city on a strip of land between two small lakes. It's where Ann and Joe Bennett, a teacher and a biotech executive, respectively, live and were going to retire – until 2019. That year, they took a vacation to Newfoundland and fell in love with the rugged shores, plunging cliffs and vast oceanscapes. Now they are set to spend their golden years on the Rock, having recently finished a house in Bonavista.

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL



JANE BROKENSHERE/Supplied

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

The design, conceived by St. John's architect Evan Hoyles, evokes the island's traditional saltbox houses with a steep roof, cedar shingle siding and stilts that hold the structure above the crags. It's also built to reflect the Bennetts' growing love of their adopted province. A loft space above the kitchen, accessed by a white ladder, is like a room-sized viewfinder. Two beanbag chairs slouch by a long picture window that is west-facing for epic sunsets. A giant telescope helps take it all in, the area's puffin population included.

"My clients come to appreciate the wild," Hoyles says. "From that window, they use the telescope to look out at whales, icebergs and the untamed coast. I've never been to Wisconsin, but I imagine those are things they can't see there."