


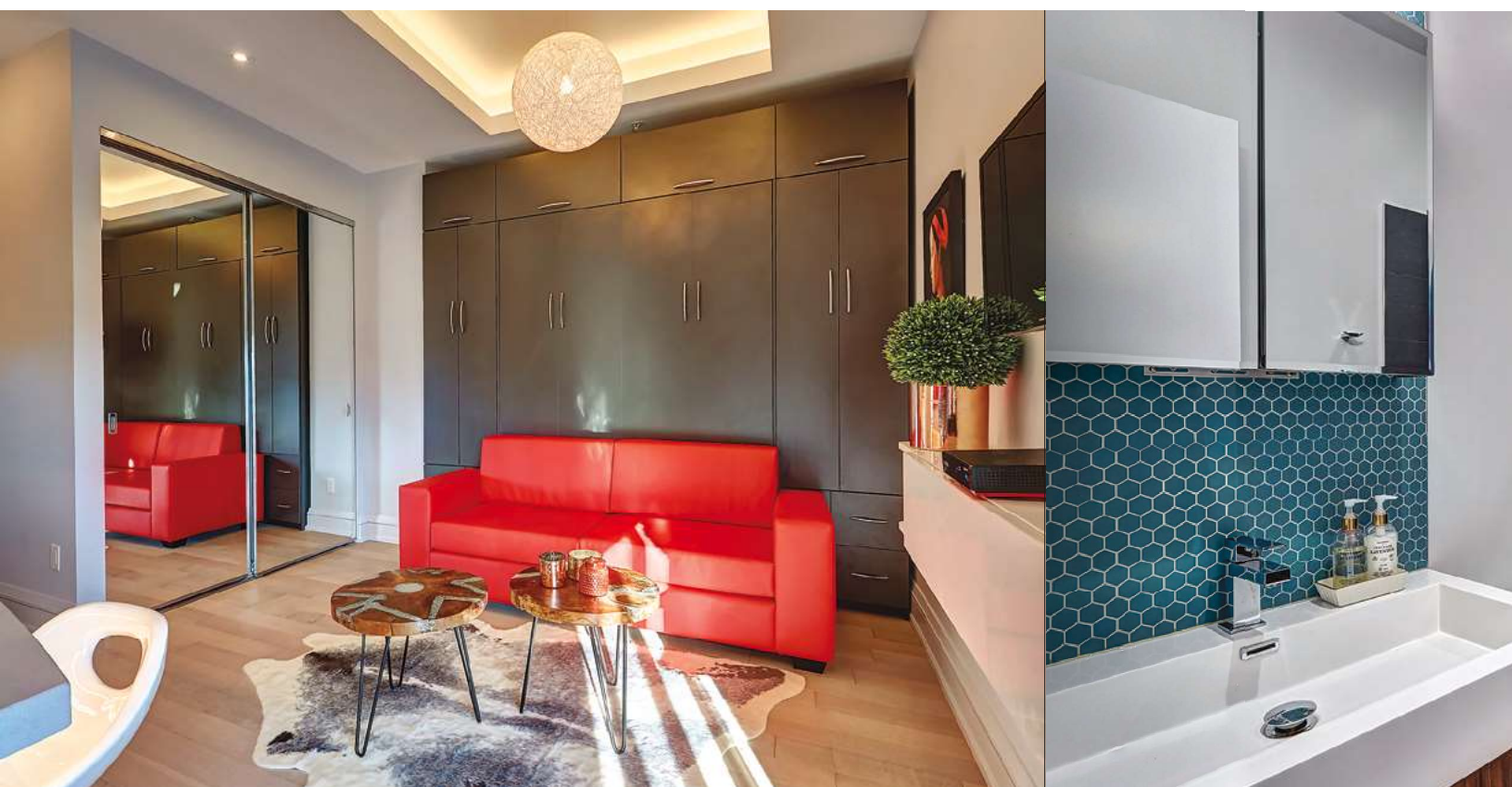
featurestory / ROB BLACKSTIEN

Market Makeover





Barbini Corporation overcame myriad challenges to transform a Victorian home into a highly efficient, mixed-use, four-storey building in Toronto's famed Kensington Market.



Left, a modern sofa and cabinets cleverly store a Murphy bed. Centre, bathrooms feature customizable fans to control humidity, protecting against mould.

It's only fitting that the renovation of a building whose history is so rooted in storytelling would become its most gripping drama to date.

“Challenging” doesn’t begin to describe the task that faced Toronto-based design-build firm Barbini Corporation when it was contracted with overhauling a century-old home in Toronto’s legendary Kensington Market neighbourhood. Describing this project as “Sisyphean” might have been more appropriate. But in this case, principal Amedeo Barbini and construction manager Raul Alberto somehow did get that boulder to the top of the hill – with tremendous results.

Located just south of College Street on Augusta Avenue, the Victorian home – estimated by Barbini to be at least 100 years old – was purchased by John McBride in 2004. It had been a mixed-use property for many years, then housing a retail pottery studio. Soon, a skateboard store moved in, with McBride building a skating ramp at the back.

Other notable recent tenants include Bread and Circus Theatre Bar, a mini Massey Hall-type business that boasted a Beatles cover band, among other performers. The building later was home to a theatre production company known as Huge Picture Productions, run by Mandy Leon, hailing from the Leon’s Furniture family.

Around 2011, McBride decided it was time for a makeover, and he had some very specific ideas about what he wanted – not only in terms of the look and feel of the structure, but also the type of tenants. His goal was to make a “seamless integration into the market.”

McBride says he knew about Barbini because “he has a very good reputation in the area that I was living,” and at the time the renovation was being planned, Barbini Corp. was handling the property management for the building, so it was a natural fit to become the project contractor for The Kensington.

Living on the edge

That reputation is well founded. An industry veteran of over 40 years,

Barbini has grown his business into a full-service design-build firm that specializes in what he calls “environment creation.” The company’s client list is impressive, including various condos, CFNY Radio (what is now The Edge), Sun Life, Bell Canada, plus many massive luxury homes. Barbini Corp.’s projects have been profiled by the likes of HGTV and several major housing-related publications.

But if not for the proliferation of synthesizers, Barbini may have been blowing his own horn in an entirely different manner – literally. He eschewed studying architecture at university to try his hand as a professional trumpet player, playing with a couple of bands that enjoyed



Right, a light-filled kitchen with plenty of storage and counter space. Ventilators supply fresh air without the need to open windows to smells and sounds.

modest success in Canada, and working with some future Canadian musical legends, including Bruce Cassidy (of Lighthouse and Blood, Sweat & Tears).

However, in the early '70s, widespread adoption of synthesizers was a death knell for many a horn player, forcing Barbini to choose a different career path. Since then, he's developed his industry expertise to the point that Alberto says "it's almost like having a bible of construction one phone call away."

That experience would stand both men well when faced with the biggest test of their respective careers in the Kensington renovation, a project which seemed to feature as its main characteristic a penchant for curve balls.

The team dealt with a host of challenges, including:

- Access

There was very limited front access to the site – a long, narrow alleyway accessible only from the back. With existing buildings just a couple of feet away on each side of the property, it was impossible to use a crane for any of the construction, leaving Alberto to employ what he describes jokingly as "Cuban ingenuity." (For more on how he worked around this issue, see "On Site: Thinking outside the box," page 25). This proved a massive issue with deliveries as well.

- Mixed use

Once the group settled on the format (main floor and basement: retail; second floor: flex office space; third floor: residential), figuring out which components were earmarked to which section required plenty of attention.

- Last-minute expansion

Well into the design phase, McBride

decided he wanted an extra seven feet of space at the rear of the building. Unfortunately, the increased footage was just enough to change the project designation from a small building to a large building under the Ontario Building Code. The new classification meant that architectural technologist Brian Abbey had to hand the planning over to a licensed architect, James Sa'd, which was another obstacle. As a large building, Barbini explains, this project was subject to "more and stricter requirements."

- The surprise guest

When the project had gotten underway, Barbini only knew that the main and basement floors would be occupied by some type of retail tenant. And then came the big surprise: it was to be Kensington Brewery. "The infrastructure of the brewery had very different requirements than other



Common areas: Left, second-floor flex office space is bright and spacious. Right, residential hallways are beautifully outfitted with custom lighting.

tenants would,” Barbini explains. There were unique needs akin to a manufacturing facility in terms of the amount of power needed; mechanical and electrical issues; and structural changes to the design to not only house the huge tanks that extended from the basement to the ground floor, but to accommodate them with bigger beams and reinforced concrete in the basement.

- Rainwater policy

This was the biggest hurdle of the project, requiring the hiring of a civil engineer for a process that took 15 months. The city’s retroactive storm water policy, which calls for each building to be able to hold one inch of water to create a lag for releasing into the storm drains, is extremely difficult to interpret. Barbini went back and forth with the water department, submitting their proposal and only

getting the policy in return – no explanation. “The city is a difficult animal to deal with because they change things,” he says. What made it most difficult was that “the person doing the evaluation wasn’t clear with what they wanted.” Ultimately, they settled on a storm water system that would hold up to four inches of water from the roof before being transferred into tanks with 3,000 litres of holding capacity. Some of this water will be treated by a Greyter grey water system and then used to flush toilets on the top floor. Down the road, the brewery may also use some of this capacity.

- Smells, sounds and vibrations With the brewery on board, McBride was insistent its smells, sounds and vibrations be contained to the ground floor. Mississauga-based soundproofing consultant AcoustiGuard-Wilrep Ltd. was brought

in to help design the solution, which included Roxul insulation (not only on exterior walls, but also many interior walls); an exterior stucco finish; and a wall system featuring GenieClips, double drywall and green glue.

* * *

The modified building envelope is impressive, starting with the basement, where the existing foundation walls were underpinned and a new foundation wall was created inside to support the newly constructed walls. Two-inch foam was added to reduce thermal bridging and provide moisture protection, R-14 Roxul batts were added inside and insulation was added below the basement slab.

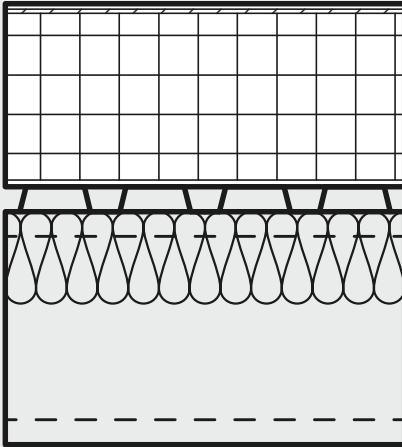
The main walls are comprised of structural steel studs with R-22 Roxul cavity insulation and three inches (260 sheets) of Roxul comfort board



BARBINI is a Toronto based design/build company that enables clients to fulfill their individual needs and be involved every step of the way. We are committed to delivering quality, value and style. We feel that communication with our clients is the key to creating environments that reflect their individual needs and lifestyle; transforming houses into homes.

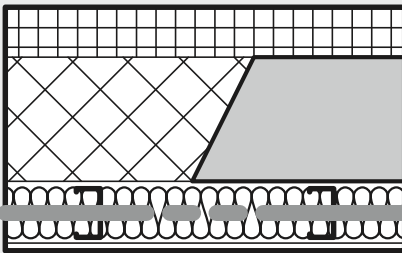
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THE KENSINGTON'S
R1 ROOF AND W5 WALL DETAILS



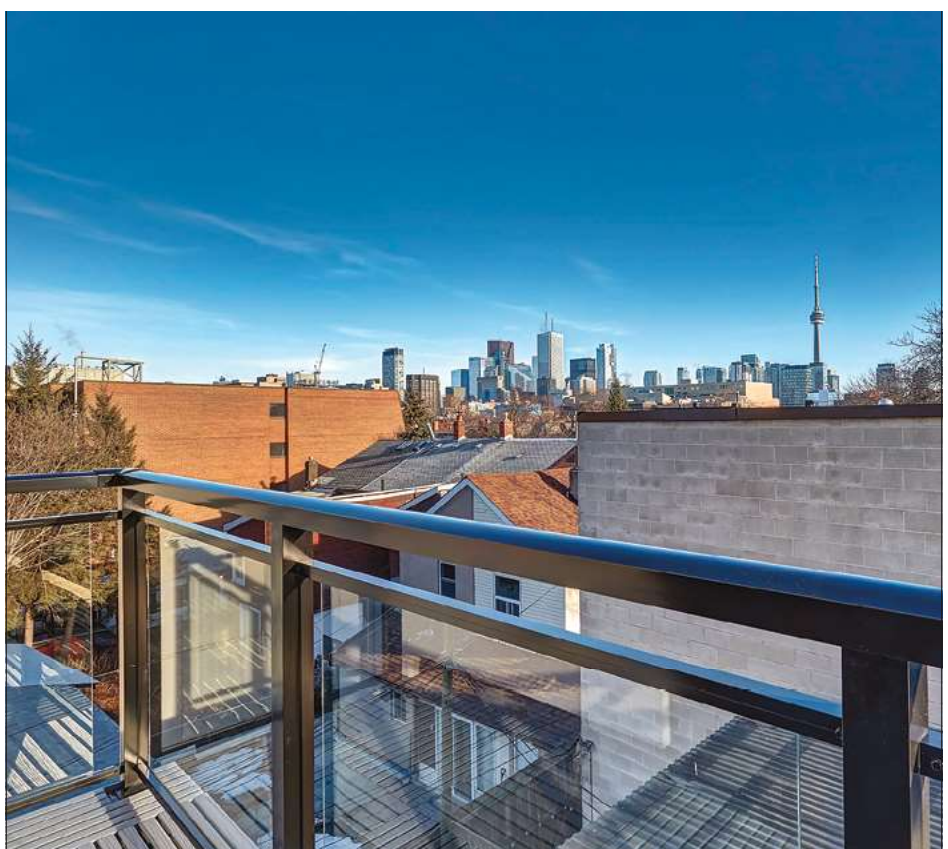
R1

- Modified bitumen roofing membrane
- ½" protection board
- 10" rigid insulation, tapered, seal joints
- ½" sheathing
- Steel deck (see structural drawings)
- Steel joists (see structural drawings)
- 5½" mineral wool insulation in cavities



W3

- EIFS on new block – ground floor – 2hr
- InsulROCK NC EIFS system
- 3" EIFS w. 2½" Roxul ROCKBOARD 80 (R-10)
- Integral drainage layer
- Air/vapour barrier
- Concrete block – new, or existing (see structural drawings)
- 6" steel stud
- 6" batt insulation (R-22)
- 6 mil poly vapour barrier
- 1/2" drywall
- 2 hour F.R.R. fire separation (O.B.C. SB-2, table 2.1.1.)



The Kensington's storm water system will hold up to four inches of water from the roof before being transferred into tanks, some of which will be treated by a grey water system.

80, for a total of R-36 walls. For sound attenuation and thermal insulation, 308 bags of Roxul batt insulation were used. The windows are second to none: high-performance fibreglass, with low solar heat gain glass. The high-tech roof system boasts a shaped inverted roof system at R-65. Even the brewery is equipped with a commercial heat recovery ventilator to manage moisture and to reclaim heat. All these things result in this building being 44% better than the 2012 Code.

This dovetails nicely into Barbini Corp.'s approach to all its projects, as Barbini explains: "we have a real big green component."

Energy-saving features

The four stylish bachelor apartment suites on the top floor are designed in a particularly environmentally friendly – and space-conscious (featuring Murphy beds) – manner. Each suite has a Panasonic energy recovery ventilator system so fresh air is continuously supplied without

having to open windows, offering "tremendous" energy cost savings.

A Panasonic WhisperGreen fan in the bathroom turns on automatically and turns off at customized settings. It also includes a humidity sensor, so the fan keeps running until the humidity is eliminated after showers, providing protection against mould. Each suite is equipped with a ductless split air conditioner heat pump to create individual zoning. Hot water comes from a high-efficiency central hot water tank.

In the end, The Kensington project incorporates Barbini's philosophy of combining form, function and beauty. Despite all the hurdles, Alberto's pragmatic approach saw the project through: "They say you can eat an elephant one bite at a time, so this project for me was like one day at a time." **BB**

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