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BY LESLIE SMITH

Design studio Cecconi Simone knows a thing or two about luxury modern interiors – just check out any of its sleek model suites, lavish hotels or inspired townhouses located across Toronto. Principal Anna Simone offers time-tested tricks for creating covetable interiors in any home



Lighthaus's model suite features a 12-foot-long island with ample space for cooking, hosting and eating (it can accommodate 14 people).



RIGHT: Lighthouse's open-plan living and dining area has inset shelving that encases storage, a fireplace and the television.

BOTTOM: A wall-sized photo of iron gates in Edition Richmond is an homage to nearby Trinity Bellwoods Park.

Lighthouse's open-concept layout stretches all the way from the front entrance through to the back patio, drawing your eye across an white ceramic gas can in a wall niche and a cluster of pot lights hanging above the dining table to the smooth, vanilla-coloured expanse of floor-to-ceiling cabinetry that runs the entire length of the side wall. The model suite is for Great Gulf's upscale development of 20 townhouses in Brockton Village, and the interiors are care of local interior design studio Cecconi Simone. With 30 years of experience creating fabulous high-end spaces, the firm boasts over 70 condo projects in Toronto alone, and has been commissioned to design the interiors for One Bloor – the city's most prestigious high-rise address to date.

Inside Lighthouse, seated on the living room's off-white sectional, partner Anna Simone offers an insider primer on the elusive yet know-it-when-you-see-it quality we all call luxury. A knockout home environment, she says, stems not so much from the architectural details – cathedral ceilings and stunning staircases, for instance – but from the ascending levels of subtlety that comprise the interior spaces: lighting, textures and elements stressing continuity and balance. The art of creating impact, in other words, is a many-layered thing.

To start with, says Simone, it's vital to select one main focal point for a room, such as a fireplace, entertainment unit or even a storage wall like Lighthouse's sleek floor-to-ceiling cabinetry. "Everything stems from there. Lighting, layout, furniture positions – these all support and enhance your focal point." For example, in the model suite of Edition Richmond, a 20-unit townhouse development by Curated Properties located



on Richmond St. W., Simone installed a wall-to-wall, blown-up sepia photo of an iron-gated park entrance that visually expands the living room while paying homage to the Victorian sensibilities of the townhome's leafy Trinity Bellwoods environs.

She warns, however, that great care must be taken with feature walls; you can easily grow tired of a bold contrast colour. Instead, she suggests a statement feature made from natural material, such as wood or stone, that becomes almost a part of the house's architecture.

When it comes to lighting, Simone says that the absolute worst thing for a room is to have only one or two light sources: "You have to light all four corners. It looks great and makes the room appear larger. And put everything on dimmers. This lets you create many moods, instead of having

only one type of light level."

Simone suggests mixing four main categories of lighting for a true dramatic impact. While overhead lighting brightens the space, giving an overview of the entire area, task lighting offers illumination for specific functions, such as reading and meal prep. Ambient lighting accentuates certain spots in a room (like traffic pathways and artwork) and also helps establish mood, while natural lighting comes from windows, light wells and glass doors. "It invites the outside in," she says, "lifting the tone of the room."

And when accessorizing, Simone insists that playfulness should be at a premium, and character pieces should speak to your personality. A statuette, a mask, a found object, a piece of art – by isolating the focus on such individual items, often within custom lit niches, the space offers

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a shorthand representation of its owners. "These things should reference the client's persona," she says. "When people walk into your home, they should receive an immediate impression of your presence."

Accessories are also a great way to bring shots of colour into an otherwise minimalist colour scheme. In Cecconi Simone's model suite for Block by Treasure Hill, a series of 37 townhouses situated on Shaw St. just above Little Italy, a dual-chromatic kitchen gets a hit of spice shades from, fittingly

The pristine Block suite features a pared-down palette, with the ultra-sleek dual-chromatic kitchen and beige and grey-brown tones in the living area.

enough, a shelved assortment of glass spice jars. And in the living room area, beige and grey-brown tones combine in a painting, sofa and coffee table arrangement to produce a properly balanced layout.

Yet perhaps not too balanced: three candles perched on the coffee table are proof of Simone's mantra that asymmetry, even in little things, offers more visual punch. "For some reason, accessories in groups of threes or fives or another odd number give you more rhythm," she says.

Rhythm comes from other small details, too. Back in Lighthouse, Simone points out a walnut niche box set into the white living room wall. "If you look closely, you'll see it's not flush but sticks out a little. The plane changes ever so slightly whenever a new material is introduced, and that adds to the cadence, keeping things interesting." Another example would be the tiny half-inch reveal that runs between the millwork cabinetry and the ceiling, which visually signals a break between the two different materials (a more practical benefit is that it allows for their normal contraction and expansion with changes in humidity). Such small, seemingly unremarkable details can actually have a major impact on the space: "Correct balance means it doesn't overwhelm. It gives you a seamless flow that's very pleasing to the eye."

Thus, a jaw-dropping home environment is not a question of startling the viewer with a lot of big, glitzy razzmatazz. Rather, it's the incremental accumulation of layers. And the final layer, says Simone, is an idea removed from its normal context, like white-washed timber blocks used as coffee tables or a water feature designed to evoke the great outdoors. In fact, she notes that most of the elements that she brings into an interior can be found firmly rooted in nature: "A backlit mountain, or a shaft of light breaking through a forest canopy. The play of space and proportion, light and dark, balance and asymmetry – if you use these natural elements, you really can't go wrong." **A**



Ambient light fills Edition's spaces via a variety of direct and indirect sources as well as ample natural light.