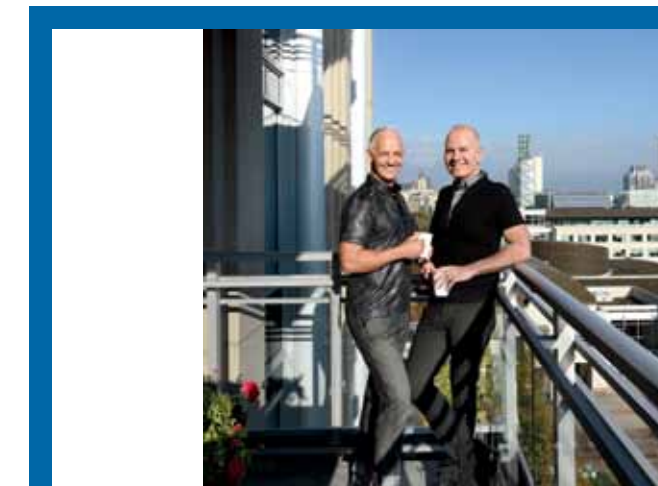




■ **Left** The Merit is open to the city. The owners were looking for a bright space and realized that they would get that by picking a corner unit high off the ground with unobstructed views

■ **Above** The living and dining area looks out to the east and to the north; it also connects to the kitchen. The owners wanted an open space with clear views to the outside and worked with interior designer Penny Southam to maximize views and sightlines

■ **Top** Owners Jean-Louis Bouchard (left) and George Parry went from a traditional house to an ultra-modern condo in the sky. Because they bought off plan, they were able to customize the space to reflect their tastes and interests



# ROOM WITH A HUE

It may be tricked out with high-tech touches, but these condo owners ensured that their home remained grounded, filling it with meaningful art and comfortable furniture

**BY DANIEL DROLET  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GORDON KING**

**MORNING LIGHT IS REFLECTING** softly off the condo's walls and cupboards and counters, all in calm tones of off-white and grey. The space is swathed in a soft, soothing glow — nothing jarring, nothing loud. Indeed, during the day, the eye is drawn immediately to the outside view — a majestic panorama of the landmark sights of downtown. Parliament Hill, the Château Laurier, the National Arts Centre, City Hall, and the Shaw Centre command attention, and it is only after you've drunk in the sights that your eye returns to the interior, resting on the many artworks arranged on walls and shelves around the open-concept living, dining, and kitchen space.



■ **Above** The kitchen is open to the living and dining area. In the original design, the kitchen was closed off. Where it was not possible to remove pipes or other fittings, designer Penny Southam boxed them in to create such features as the narrow wall on which the owners have hung a piece of art

But while openness and an even-tempered aura are the first impression, owners Jean-Louis Bouchard and George Parry have ensured that technology and design can also work together to set a bolder mood — particularly after dark. Many condos have spectacular views, after all, but how many boast an ingenious lighting system that can match the lighting inside to the rich hues outside as the sun sets? And other condos may be open-concept, but how many take that idea and fully run with it, with interior full glass walls that transform from clear to opaque at the touch of a switch?

In this space, nothing is standard. Here, absolutely everything has been reimagined, but with a consistency to the elements so that design, artwork, and furniture all work together in a way that is both calming and energizing.

**JEAN-LOUIS AND GEORGE**, who both have professional backgrounds, had been living in a house in the Golden Triangle for 30 years. “We always thought we would stay there for the rest of our lives,” says George. Around 2009, they started to think about buying a second property. But instead of a cottage — too much upkeep and too many mosquitoes, they say — they opted for a condo in downtown Montreal as a weekend retreat. And there, they had an epiphany: they discovered light. The condo was high enough in the building to be flooded with natural light all day. “Our house in Ottawa was blocked by other houses. We always had the lights on because it was always dark,” recalls George.

■ **Facing page** The high-tech lighting scheme was created both to accentuate the couple’s artwork and to provide ambience. The kitchen has many moods. The owners can set and control the lighting from their tablets or smartphones. They say it’s actually easier to control than the less technologically advanced system in their previous house



The couple decided to trade their home for a local condo in the sky that would be both brighter and easier to maintain. When a friend told them about The Merit, an art-deco-style condo tower being built by Charlesfort Developments near Ottawa City Hall, they bought a unit off the plan and immediately set about making it their own. Not content to take it as Charlesfort was presenting it — 2,045 square feet, with two bedrooms, a den, and 2½ baths — they hired interior designer Penny Southam of Southam Design to turn their ideas into reality. “The original layout was not to our taste,” recalls Jean-Louis. “Especially the kitchen. There were walls everywhere. We love openness.”

Southam took that request for openness and ran with it. “They were willing to push the envelope,” says the designer, adding that it’s great when clients give her so much scope to “play” with. The result is a unique living space that very much reflects the owners and their love of open space, art, and technology. Out went walls. And where it wasn’t possible to remove them completely — pipes have to go somewhere — Southam boxed in the pipes and created design features. She created a series of coves, which are lit with colour kinetic lighting for added flair, giving the illusion of height. The walls and cabinets throughout are done in neutrals anchored by a warm jatoba wood floor. When the lights aren’t on, colour in the main room comes from



■ **This page** By day, the decor is softer and more neutral and shows off the couple’s art. The shelf in the living area, above, picks up on the soft greys from the adjacent kitchen. In the open kitchen, right, the different planes of the counters create visual interest



■ **Right** The neutral shades from the kitchen and living area carry over to the master bed and bath. Because the home is so open, the design elements must carry through to tie everything together



■ **Left and above** The owners love technology, and their home reflects that — from the high-tech lighting system to the glass walls that go opaque at the touch of a switch. Both the owners and the designer let their imaginations run wild throughout this project

the artwork. There’s a lot of it, all over. The couple collects everything from paintings to sculpture and glass — and they wanted to show it all off. But though many of the paintings are very different in style, no one piece jumps out. It’s as if, intuitively, they chose art that all played to the same intensity. Southam adds that the neutral decor helps showcase the couple’s art and the design elements within the condo. “If the space had been really busy with colour, then the details would have been lost and it would have been just too much,” she explains.

The couple’s love of technology is most apparent in the lighting but also makes an appearance in their furniture. Underneath the glass top of their dining table, for example, the visible cogs and sprockets resemble the interior of a giant watch. At the push of a button, those cogs and sprockets begin to turn, pushing out two glass leaves to extend the table and raising them perfectly into place. The living area is lit by a system of LED strip

lights linked to the condo’s wireless internet system and controlled by an app on the couple’s smartphones. They can turn the lights on and off and adjust for colour, style of lighting, and intensity.

One of the condo’s most unusual features is the use of privacy glass walls in the master bedroom and bathroom areas. The glass morphs from clear to opaque at the flip of a switch. In clear mode, the glass wall allows an unimpeded view from the master bedroom through the media room and out to the main living area and the outdoor views beyond. In privacy mode, the glass frosts and the bedroom is hidden. The glass wizardry is courtesy of Vario Glass, a Quebec-based company that manufactures all manner of “smart glass” for homes and offices.

“It’s wonderful to work with people like George and Jean-Louis,” says Southam as she surveys her clients’ home. “Their taste is fabulous, and their furniture and their artwork just add to the beauty of the space.” ■

# OUR VISION



## Jean-Louis:

**We absolutely love the view.** It wows us. And I love having everything on one floor. ↑

**The most surprising feature is the glass walls that go opaque.** They open everything up, which is what we wanted. We have spectacular views all the time. ↗

**This condo reveals** that we like to create comfortable nests and that we like to work together to create them. We are lucky that we have similar tastes: we're not interested in antiques, and we like technology and design.

## George:

**Our must-have was the technology.** From the electronic toilets to the mechanical dining table to the lighting system to the programmable ovens, there is a lot of technology here. And there is a marriage between design and technology. →

**Our favourite design feature is the lighting.**

At night, especially, we can have wonderful light that creates a mood and accentuates the art. ↘

**We're proudest of the kitchen!** We both cook, and we like to do it together. Our other kitchen was too small and walled off. Now when we have visitors, they can watch us. ▀

