

Homes

This one's for you, mom and dad

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There's a reason celebrity designer Karen Sealy feels at home on a construction site.

From a very young age she was building and fixing things alongside her dad, John, an electrician by trade.

When she bought her first house, he took vacation time to help renovate it. And when that experience prompted her to leave a successful marketing career in the IT sector to pursue interior design, her parents were among her strongest supporters.

Now that she's made a name for herself as a TV décor expert and owner of Toronto's Sealy Design Inc., it's payback time ... in a good way.

After more than 15 years on the road, enjoying retirement life in their 36-foot RV, Sealy's parents are homeowners again.

On her advice, they purchased a small, run-down bungalow in a prime Kingston, Ontario, location – in Sealy's words, the “ugly duckling” on the street. “We knew it was a disaster, which is the kind of house I love to buy,” she says.

For most seniors, the move to a bungalow is downsizing. For Sealy's parents, the 1,000-square-foot home was like a mansion. But the work ahead was daunting.

Her mom Sharon's biggest complaint was that the front door opened directly into a tiny kitchen, leaving no room for a hall; there was also very little closet space in the three small bedrooms and no powder room.

At 78 (with the energy of a 40-year-old, says Sealy), John was prepared to tackle the renovation himself. But after several weeks of boondocking — camping in their driveway without hookups — the process began to take its toll.

When her parents left on a pre-arranged overseas trip, Sealy donned her tool belt and headed for Kingston with the rest of the Sealy Design Team in tow, determined to finish the job.

“I wanted to take the pressure off,” says Sealy, noting that the exterior also needs updating and the basement is unfinished. “I thought the main thing is to give them a place to live where they're comfortable and happy, then they have time to figure out the rest.”

In just six weeks, and with the support of several local suppliers, partners and friends, the team pulled off what normally would have taken three to six months.

The entire left side of the home was opened from front to back to create a bright, inviting space, stretching from the living room through a dining area to a stunning blue/grey kitchen and cozy den at that back that doubles as guest room and can be cordoned off with a sliding barn door.

By closing in a breezeway at the rear of the home, Sealy gained valuable closet space for the master bedroom. And by relocating the kitchen to what used to be a bedroom, she opened up space for a large front foyer with closet and even found room to tuck a small powder room in.

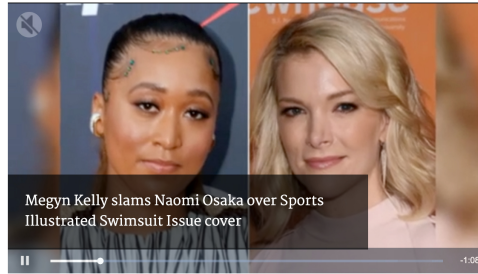
One of Sealy's design tricks is repetition. “No matter what you're doing, you need to let people know it's intentional and the best way to do that is to repeat it,” she says. “In the case of my parent's home, it was repeating the colour palette.”

To offset the coolness of the blue kitchen cabinets and grey furnishings, she chose a warm cream wall colour throughout, applying

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a slightly darker shade in the den. "You need the contrast of the warm and the cool; it adds more drama to the place and you also get an element of cozy," she says. To stay on budget, Sealy maintained her focus on "cost to install," a trait she learned from her dad. Rotating the toilet in the main bathroom, for example, was more economical than moving it. Converting the den window into a full sliding door was an affordable way to gain a new access to the backyard. Of all the construction sites she's been on, this one was special. "I pulled out some of their mementos from years gone by, things they had to box up 15 years ago like my grandma's old cookie jar and candy dish," she says. "I love the idea of my mom walking through the house and finding these things."



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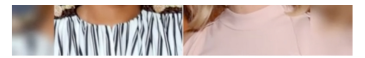
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