

# An Eye For Colour

An ophthalmologist's condo switches from party central to a quiet retreat in the blink of an eye

by Carissa Halton photography by Curtis Comeau

**Once a year**, Michael Dorey's ultra-modern bedroom is transformed; his bed is replaced by turntables, computers, speakers and a strobe light. The early part of the evening is filled with Dorey's ophthalmologist colleagues and their families enjoying catered hors d'oeuvres and drinks from the pop-up bar that overlooks the north part of downtown. From this 10th floor penthouse, the illuminated rib cage of the stadium draws guests' eyes northeast.

Then around 11 p.m., the evening's music shifts with the stroke of a DJ's index finger: A heavy dance beat builds. The dancing strobe flashes off the Swarovski pendant. Falling diamonds of light spray the room. Guests can't help but move onto the dance floor.

Aside from this one night a year, the 1,750-square-foot space serves the purpose for which it was designed: It's a retreat from the business that comes with Dorey's career. As a clinical assistant professor at the University of Alberta, he lectures and travels. As an ophthalmologist, he does vision-correction surgery and other eye surgeries across Western Canada. >>



Dorey bought this penthouse three years ago, before anything had been built inside the suite. He wanted to customize it. “When I was looking, there weren’t a lot of ultra-modern condos,” he says.

Etienne Grossi, owner of Shantam Interiors remembers, “He came to me and said, ‘I want a New York, ultra-modern space.’ I looked at the plans for this suite and said, ‘You didn’t buy that!’ The original blueprints had been for a very traditional space.”

At the time, Grossi was working on a number of projects in the building, including the condo’s deluxe atrium filled with cherry wood trim, Venetian plaster columns and light from the two-storey wall of east-facing windows. Dorey liked his work, and together they developed a plan that fit the client’s vision. Besides the modern interior design, Dorey wanted a larger kitchen, a more open concept and a better designed bedroom. When they finished the layout, they moved on to choosing lights, fixtures and finishes, then began the challenging task of furnishing the space.

“Working with Etienne, I always had a choice,” says Dorey. “He would give a recommendation or top two.”

“I bring things that I know will work, but it also comes down to understanding what he wants,” Grossi says. “For instance, my colour palette for this project started out very neutral with black, white, grey and wood. Then, we accessorized with colour.”

The finished space is one that is open and filled with colour that pops immediately on entry. The centre stack of the suite is covered in custom wallpaper designed by Grossi and printed by online company, Rollout: Bright red circles, reminiscent of targets, are set like a grid on light grey background. Across from the entrance door, a high-gloss, crimson sideboard is topped by one of Grossi’s own paintings: “The Undressing of the Bouffon.” A clown’s expressionless face is captured mid-way through her nightly ritual of make-up removal. Clown lines stretch out from her empty eyes and there is an air of sadness to this piece that adds a bass note of



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**–Etienne Grossi**

seriousness to the whimsy of the wallpaper and the cheer of the sideboard. Swarovski crystal sconces fill the space with jazz.

The entry opens into Dorey’s living space: The north-facing kitchen is lit with the setting sun that also slips through colourful French sheers into the adjoining living and dining rooms.

“We initially thought we’d need a crane to bring this up,” Dorey says, as he taps the imposing island of black, matte-finished granite. The unique finish brings out the shards of composite and it looks like polished fossilized rock. Instead of a crane, they used the elevator. It didn’t travel inside the elevator, though, but on top.

The island’s unique skirting, a high-gloss zebra wood, integrates with the cabinets that stretch from the hand-scraped, walnut floor to the 12-foot-high ceiling. “We really vacillated about putting cabinets up so high,” says Dorey. He may be tall, but a stepladder is still required to reach his turkey roaster. “We felt that the continuation of the line was important for the aesthetic.”

And, it is stunning. Custom-built by Redl, the exotic wood stretches its waving black and brown lines two-thirds up the wall, then is capped by black. The back splash is Italian glass — its colour changes with the light. Black, grey, blue and hints of copper shift their tones with the rising and setting of the sun, with the dimming and brightening of the under-mount cabinet lights.

A sectional from Vancouver’s Inform Interiors beckons the conversation into the living room. “This was something that Michael picked out on his own,” says Grossi, with a mock hard stare at Dorey.

Dorey shrugs, “I thought it would work, but it was too bland.”

Both men agreed it needed something. The all-grey upholstery begged for colour, so Grossi had the back cushions re-upholstered and another set made in deep purple brocade, maroon and copper silks. >>




It is not a “floppable” couch, however. So when it comes time to actually relax, Dorey is drawn from the sectional, past the dining room and into the master suite. In the original plan, there was to be two rooms. Now it is one large space with a second balcony, a gas fireplace with zebra wood surround, a cowhide carpet, and dark chocolate leather chairs.

Tucked behind the door is a small, black digital keyboard. It’s Dorey’s most recent creative focus, now that designing his penthouse is winding down. He was a classically-trained pianist turned jazz player throughout high school. Then, for 15 years after he entered medical school, he didn’t touch a piano for longer than a couple minutes of scattered, memorized lines.

This year he bought the keyboard and started taking jazz lessons again. He’s begun writing songs.

“The acoustics in this room are really quite lovely,” says Dorey. When Grossi begins to protest that he wished they’d created a space for it, Dorey shakes his head. “I know it doesn’t fit the design in this room but, for my practical use, it’s great.”

Grossi’s aim of creating *shantam* for his clients (a Sanskrit word meaning “calmness”) has been achieved in this modern space. That is, until Dorey’s next big party when, perhaps, the keyboard will be allowed to stay and sometime between midnight and 1 a.m., a tall ophthalmologist with an eye for colour will play a couple ditties he wrote the other day. 

**Sources:**  
**Couch** from Inform Interiors. (50 Water St., Vancouver, 604-682-3868, [informinteriors.com](http://informinteriors.com))  
**Leather chair** from Inform Interiors.  
**Artwork** from Farmboy Fine Arts. (319 West Hastings, Vancouver, 604-699-2466, [farmboyfinearts.com](http://farmboyfinearts.com))  
**Ligne Roset coffee table** from Dwell Modern. (10549 124 St., 780-488-6464, [dwellmodern.ca](http://dwellmodern.ca))  
**Ligne Roset lamp** from Dwell Modern.  
**Poltrona Frau bed** from Dwell Modern.  
**Vase** from 18 Karat. (18karatwholesale.com)  
**Painting** above bed by Jochem Gebhardt.  
**“Waiting for You” painting** on wall by Yelena Reznik.  
**Poltrona Frau leather chairs** from Dwell Modern.  
**Ligne Roset sidetable** from Dwell Modern.  
**Wallpaper**, designed by Etienne Grossi, printed by Rollout. ([custom.rollout.ca](http://custom.rollout.ca))  
**Ligne Roset bench** from Dwell Modern.  
**“The Undressing of the Bouffon” painting** by Etienne Grossi.  
**Barstools** from Dwell Modern.  
**Custom made island** by Redl World Class Kitchens. (10341 124 St., 780-756-7200, [redlkitchens.com](http://redlkitchens.com))

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