

Home Sweet Home

Designer Alykhan Velji (right) and his partner, Jason Krell, in their renovated Calgary home. Velji worked with Phoenix Concrete Works in Edmonton to design the fireplace facade to cover the original brick—a combination of fluted concrete tiles under a custom frame.



LOVE IS IN THE DETAILS

A holiday visit to designer Alykhan Velji's newly renovated home is a transporting experience of warmth, beauty and joie de vivre.

By Jacquie Moore
Photos by Michelle Johnson



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Feast for the Senses

Set for a holiday feast, the dining room is richly decorated with pretty cloches, plum puddings and seasonal fruit. “We wanted to introduce colours you normally wouldn’t think of for the holiday—beautiful deep burgundies, deep oranges and greens,” says Velji.



Out of the dozen years that designer Alykhan Velji and his partner, Jason Krell, lived in their Chinook Park four-level split in Calgary, nearly four were spent renovating. “We did it in stages, starting with paint and flooring, then the upstairs bathroom, the lower level, the main floor and finally the exterior and backyard,” says Velji, who describes his design style during that time as “mid-century with a twist.” Perhaps not surprisingly to friends and clients familiar with Velji’s exuberance and creativity, by the time the house was completed, the designer was eyeing the upstairs bathroom again.

“Jason shut that down,” Velji says with a laugh. Indeed, unenthused by the prospect of starting over in the same house they’d made an exquisite, long-term project of, Krell suggested the couple find a new itch to scratch—and, after a brief search, a 1959 gem-of-a-bungalow a few blocks away became their magnum opus. Guttled, made over and moved into a little more than a year ago, the house is warm, pragmatic and inviting—a wide embrace of a home created to delight friends and family as much as its gregarious inhabitants. It is signature Velji, currently amplified by elegant (and budgetarily attainable) holiday decor.

Setting the Velji-Krell house apart from every other bungalow on the street is a large round window that catches the eye, softens the angles and looks like a portal to another world. And it is. The home gave Velji, who steers Alykhan Velji Design, the opportunity to play with an aesthetic he calls “Modern Renaissance.” His nod to 17th-century architecture is subtle but foundational: Velji removed walls and tight hallways to create an open, airy main floor, then vaulted the ceiling to add a feeling of expansiveness to the 1,500-square-foot house. Where in the couple’s previous home he had lived up a mid-century vibe with “crazy pops of colour” throughout, this time he focused on fabric, paint and accessories in warmer, softer tones with rich punctuations of dark green, deep orange and plum.

“I’m at a different place in my design journey, exploring more textural materials and warmth,” says Velji. “I still love the mid-century Palm Springs vibe, but I wanted to do something a little more elevated and traditional.” Textural finishes in wood, stone and fabric and a subdued colour palette make for an elegant backdrop to domestic life any day of the year, and play well with





Vintage Charm

"I love using natural textures and tones, and I wanted to reflect that in our holiday décor. It's a beautifully layered look—when people walk in, I want it to just feel like home," says Velji. On the tree, for example (bottom right), natural wooden ornaments pair with dried orange slices, hand-painted bells and lots of sparkle. On the fireplace (middle) and throughout the home, vintage candlesticks and candlelight bring a warmth to the space.





Doggone It

Velji and Krell's rescue dog, Espresso, has his own Instagram account (@eshpoo), where you can follow his antics (and holiday outfits!). Throughout the home Velji introduced both live and faux greens and fruits for staying power (opposite page). "When the indoor heating is up high, the last thing you want is shrivelled fruit!" he says with a laugh.



seasonal winter decor such as evergreen boughs, brass candlesticks and gold-lit Christmas trees. A wood-burning fireplace is the focal point of the living room—a key feature that both invites quiet solitude and beckons a cocktail-party crowd. It's the latter that invigorates Velji and Krell on a regular basis: "We love entertaining and making visitors feel special," says Velji. "That's the most important thing about this house to us."

An arched doorway adjacent to the fireplace draws the eye—and the aforementioned crowd—to a sunken, forest-green room beyond. In almost comical understatement, Velji refers to this tiny, magical space as the "auxiliary room." A continuation of the main floor's chevron-patterned hardwood flooring plus a chandelier saved from the home's original dining room and butterflies-on-black wallpaper on the ceiling give glamour and ambiance to a room that was originally a single-car garage. "We wanted to extend our living space, so we rebuilt a garage in the back," says Velji. The auxiliary room contains a small studio where the couple films episodes of their YouTube channel and TV segments as *The Style Guys*, and it provides more room to entertain. This is where the party starts: a bespoke, ruby-red cocktail from the built-in bar is likely to complement a platter of pomegranates, figs and cakes on the table in the centre of the room. In summer, French doors open to the south-facing backyard; in December, the fireplace beckons.

Velji's take on seasonal decor dovetails with his wider philosophy around home design. "For me, it's about creating a special atmosphere and taking time to curate moments that look collected over time," he says. While celebrating Christmas wasn't part of Velji's Muslim childhood home, Martha Stewart was ever-present—he watched her show and made her seasonal decorations every year. "To me, that's the greatest thing about holiday decorating—the opportunity to make special, unique things that add interest and change it up every year."

This year, Velji and Krell spent most of their Christmas decorating budget on fresh greenery; beyond that, they scoured Home Sense and thrift stores for candlesticks, antique finds and unusual decor elements for that perfect, curated mix of old and new, and dried oranges to scatter throughout the house. "You can create a sense of opulence, at Christmastime or anytime, that isn't about spending money—it's about paying attention to details, being thoughtful about your design choices and setting up beautiful vignettes throughout your house." For Velji, that's the key, perhaps, to opening your own portal to the marvellous world inside. **///**