

LIVING SPACES

A bit of Paris perched above Queen West

Françoise and Dante Larcade create a home for eclectic lives



LEANNE DELAP
IN HOUSE

You must excuse us, our house . . . it smells of stinky cheese." A noon-hour appointment coincides with the arrival of an enormous raw-milk Brie, which means we must sample the wheel with wine. Damn, Parisians are chic. It's hard not to reflect on this Culture 101 cliché in the relaxing presence of Dante and Françoise Larcade. In the incredible — yes, I use these exuberant words with intent — live/work world they have created on Queen Street West near Manning Avenue, I see the very best of Toronto, our city of immigrants. Some new arrivals are more fabulous than others.

Their gallery shop, Roseland, is a perfectly curated trove of grand-scale antiques and sometimes wacky but compelling new art pieces — electric orange and lime cow rugs, giant red ruffled papier-mâché eggs. I could feel intimidated, even having swung in quite chic circles myself. But this couple's warmth and enthusiasm carries from the shop into their unexpected paradise upstairs.

They are eccentric: Dante tells me that when they gutted the second- and third-floor living quarters, they decided to separate their public and private lives. So, every time they head home, they walk out the front door of their shop and around the block to the alley to use the back entrance.

The custom, wood-carved door



PHOTOS BY KEVIN VAN PAASSEN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Dante and Françoise Larcade gutted the second and third floors above their Queen West shop to make their own living space.

(by Canadian sculptor Scott Eunson, who also did the sexy blocks at Bymark) leads to the coach house. They then cross the back deck (used for openings, including one that evening for their art photography exhibit of works by Doug Beube; it reminds me of a fantasy set at the Clignancourt flea market in Paris), mount the stairs and enter their sanctuary.

The couple, both of whom are 51, bought the building in 2001, when Françoise moved from France to be with Dante. This is a second union; the two, family friends, first met when they were five in the south of France. Her father was in advertising; he is the fourth generation of art dealers, an eclectic line. His grandfather was in antiques, his father was a noted avant-garde rep.

She brought with her a previous

lifetime's worth of classic furniture and some knee-weakening oil paintings from her childhood. (Back in the day in Paris, Françoise's flat was photographed for Architectural Digest.) This marriage is also a union of taste: the two have a clear idea of what they like. First off, they tore out the walls, and switched the order of the rooms. They situated the kitchen — they love to cook and to entertain — at the front of the space, overlooking the bustle of Queen Street. Custom windows, which open both inward and at the top, allow a little of the streetcar and chatter in. They also flood the space with light, a big priority.

"There was obviously no possibility for light on the sides, so we left a wide corridor through our main floor," says Ms. Larcade. "The light from the kitchen through the salon serves us well."

Indeed, the noon sun beams happily onto a concrete table by the window. "I had the legs from a previous table," she says. "When I moved here, I was sad. Of course. But you bring with you memories. Also, if something is good, has good proportions, you always keep it."

Furniture is a renewed passion for Ms. Larcade, who through her careers, has been a jewellery and handbag designer. Now, in addition to interior design, she makes furniture, relying on her skills with metal. Mr. Larcade has been in Canada longer; he also owns the Domain of Killien resort in Haliburton.

The base of the kitchen is from Ikea, but the cabinetry is all custom, as they wanted a specific colour and arrangement. The bold red backsplash, a colour that runs through the home, is livened further with random Fornasetti face tiles. Above the table is a red and white modern glass chandelier, consisting of tubes of various sizes. The artist, Massimo Crama, is currently represented by the couple, so this is one of the few pieces that echoes the shop below.



The bold red [kitchen] backsplash, a colour that runs through the home, is livened further with random Fornasetti face tiles.

The adjacent dining room is painted a Chinese red to play off the mosaic table. "I wanted no hint of pink," says Ms. Larcade. The table, an 18th-century altar stone from Naples, was the first big purchase she ever made, at 21. (Makes me lament the Le Chateau crap I was probably splurging on at that age.) She designed the legs herself. In pride of place is a dreamy pastoral oil she had in her bedroom as a child. "I remember looking through the curtains of the bed at that picture, it was like trompe l'oeil. (Again, why was I wasting my time on David Cassidy posters?) A huge screen covers the back wall of the eating space. It is 19th-century Chinese, and was converted from its original use as shutters. Hidden in a panel is a deep cupboard. "When I design a house, I always think it must be about what you do there. If you like to entertain, there must be a place for the glasses, the plates, the big trays," she says.

A powder room is painted a bold cobalt. Above the toilet is another family oil, a regal portrait. The laundry room is also hidden. "I wish so that I could have made it bigger," she says wistfully, recalling the big productions in the south of France. (She grew up between Paris and Nice, and shows me a lovely sculpture, a gift from Dante, a

carved book by Mr. Beube, their current house artist, with a page featuring the Jardin du Luxembourg, her childhood playground.) The Larcades are not big on the Canadian kitchen party. "Kitchens are for food." The flow in the house is thus: aperitifs on the sexy low black leather sofas by B&B Italia, which Ms. Larcade has owned for 18

years, and of which she is proud: "My daughter said, ugh, leather, but they are perfect, and they are in style again."

Then dinner around the mosaic table. Coffee, cheese and dessert, plus digestifs, are served in the second sitting area of the salon — which they built out, giving them about double the original floor space — on a lovely orange velvet 19th-century English cane set, which the couple chose together. "Sometimes, someone is lying on the couch by then," she admits.

On the third floor, the bathroom is street side, another deliberate move, to keep the more peaceful rooms peaceful. Indeed, the only sound in the master bedroom and in the salon is the trickle of water from a fountain in the courtyard outside the shop.

The door to the bedroom is also by Mr. Eunson, and the stairs to the top floor were constructed with wood recovered from the boxcar of a French train. A very private terrace sits off the bedroom, which is flooded with light from more custom windows.

"This is our world," she says. And much of it, like the Larcades, has crisscrossed the ocean many times, landing on Queen Street in this gem of a place. It manages the almost impossible: to be both carefully articulated and welcoming at the same time. You really do want to sit and play with the lapis and quartz solitaire balls, and you'd never worry about placing your wine glass down.

It must be the owner's spirit, and damn, those chic French know how to reconstruct our spaces.

ldelan@globeandmail.ca



The store front on Queen Street.



The main entrance to the home.



A carved door by Scott Eunson.



Wall sconces in the living room.