

**BOOKS** Alexander MacLeod makes his Lorenzo Series debut Monday S6

**IN THE GALLERIES** Joe Blades is a multimedia one-man extravaganza S3

# salon

OUR  
HOME  
AND  
NATIVE  
LAND

## The big idea

Size matters, Judith Mackin reports from the country's largest contemporary design fair, where small spaces burst with large-scale creativity and fresh Canadian flavour. All photographs by Kelly Lawson.





# salon focus



Quadrangle's 'The Last Supper.' The installation in a shipping container-turned-dining room features 13 iconic chairs, the designer's Kid Robot collection, custom wallpaper and Moooi lights. Caroline Robbie, designer and co-collaborator, challenges us to 'Think beyond the beige!'

## Inside the box

Toronto's condo craze drives dynamic design for tight places that works anywhere, not just downtown towers. Our design columnist brings the less-is-more approach back to N.B.



Inspired by religious iconography and various modes of social interaction having to do with the presentation of food, this installation was a feast of witty and allusive nuance. The massive dining table, designed by Philippe Starck for Dedon, was surrounded by 13 iconic chairs from the likes of Breuer, Bertoia, Eames, Wegner, Jacobson and Thonet. The Extension Chair by Sjoerd Vroonland for Moooi occupied the middle, and the crown of thorns hanging from the chair's top peg completed the allusion to Da Vinci. The red, wood-beamed ceiling replicating the roof of a mouth made a virtue of mixing bright colours, of avoiding the 'must match' mentality. The wallpaper, a photograph by Richard Picton, mixed opulence and decay, complete with that modern dinner-table pariah—the cell phone.

I could have broken bread with them all day, but it was time to move on to the next shipping container-turned-design-space. As I rounded the corner, I gasped. The journey from the bright, elaborate, radiant design of *The Last Supper* container to *Our Home and Native Land* left me in a state of paralysis (my Stendhal moment come at last?). The pared-down aesthetic of this conceptual kitchen and bathroom, by Ashley Rumsey and Stanley Sun of the Toronto-based interior design studio Mason, is a truly Canadian design. The most compelling feature of the installation is the high-concept 13-foot oak table they designed; part of its surface opens on constantly running water, referencing how eating and cleansing are intimately linked. At one end of the table, water pours into a live garden, providing a continual floor and dynamic movement through the space.



Our taxi driver gestures at the skyline. "The city has run out of cranes," he says. "Look! Just look! Every where. You see cranes taking over our city!" Photographer Kelly Lawson and I, two eager pilgrims from the east on our way to IDS (Interior Design Show) 2012, Canada's largest contemporary design fair, do as we're told. Sure enough, there on the Toronto skyline we see scores of monstrous cranes delicately perched atop half-completed buildings, the bulk of which, our driver informs us, are condominiums.

Condo development is literally soaring in Toronto, driven by a desire for less commuting, smaller spaces and more culture and lifestyle amenities. Here in New Brunswick, we don't have a crane deficit, but we are seeing an upsurge in condo developments in our cities. And even for those who aren't in the market for a condo, the overall trend in Canadian housing is to reduce our footprint. The less-is-more approach is no longer an emerging trend; these days, it's a way of life. Canadians are increasingly using eco-friendly and reclaimed materials and making better use of smaller spaces.

The hope, the designers said, was that the display would invoke a 'Stendhal' moment, inducing the rapid heartbeat, dizziness, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations that happen when certain individuals are exposed to great art. While I was working myself up to have my very own Stendhal moment, I asked Mugford if his installation was inspired by Peter Greenaway's 1989 film *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*. He hugged me, enfolding me in his hot pink jacket, and exclaimed, "You get it! It was our springboard!"



Clockwise, from top: Designer Lisa Canning solves the tight space constraints of a 20-by-8-foot shipping container with dual-use furniture such as a coffee table with storage for children's toys and games; Designer Kathryn Walter's cozy, conceptual felt seat is practical, too - there's storage in the base (www.feltstudio.com); A6DS and S & A Crafts' creative design for wine storage; Heidi Earnshaw Design's small linen couch has thin sides for compact areas. Note how the firm uses accessories - a painting by Marie de Sousa, stools by Earnshaw and a cushion by Bev Hisey - to add drama.

Photos by Kelly Lawson/Lawson Photography

Cover: 'Our Home and Native Land,' a conceptual kitchen and bathroom by Ashley Rumsey and Stanley Sun of Toronto design studio Mason. The installation includes wood, suede, neon lights, found objects, cutlery by Diane von Furstenberg and plates by Vera Wang. This page, clockwise, from top: French design firm Gauthier (now available in Canada) turns the normally empty space above a child's bed into a play area; 'Cubista,' by Italian firm Ciel, is an ottoman that transforms into five dining-room seats. Available through Resource Furniture in Canada; FISHTNK Design Factory's seating/bookshelves have a New Brunswick connection: the maple and birch used in the construction are from this province; Detail of the toilet, cascading waterfall table and stone floor of 'Our Home and Native Land.'



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Although they deserve a serious shout-out for this creative and layered design, I wondered about its appeal to those unversed in the history of design, or unable or unwilling to fork over the serious scratch a dining room like this would set one back. After all, the total value of the 13 chairs, the table, the lights, to say nothing of the bevy of Kid Robots, comes in at well over \$40,000 (the two Marcel Wanders lights for Moooi alone retail for \$4,000 each). "You are exactly right," Robbie said. "There are two audiences we are speaking to, but we are saying the same thing to everyone. Think beyond the beige, think individualistic." She then made one of those brilliantly obvious points that can change the way you live: "Not every house is for sale, so don't live or limit yourself to this idea that you have to keep it in a 'marketable' state. Because the last time I checked not every house is for sale. You live in it - do something to the walls, be bright, be imaginative, be creative. Painting your walls or wallpapering is a like a haircut, it isn't permanent, or forever! It will grow out! So make your design individualistic to you!"

I asked Sun and Rumsey the same question I put to Robbie and Mugford: "How does this space speak to the general public about how they live? I, for one, can't see too many kitchens featuring a cascade waterfall and suede? What should we take as your message?" Sun explains that the suede is a conceptual flourish, that it would be more appropriate in another room. But the message is to use everyday materials in novel ways (such as the Mason jars, a sly allusion to their company name). "We felt the same way about the Mason jars. Don't hide them; display them as art. The grains inside the jars being displayed along the wall are beautiful." Rumsey agreed. "It's okay to pare down your space, to choose just a few things that you love, objects you have an emotional attachment to. Find a place for them and reduce the clutter." Although visually different, both of these "How Do You Live?" shipping container spaces use exaggerated tables in small, 20-foot-long spaces. Aside from teaching us to reinvent and rethink interior space, they reinforce that old design principle that a small space doesn't necessarily mean small furniture - or small ideas. Think big. ☺

As I watched the attendees pass by and heard various sotto voce utterances of "cool" or "tweet this!" it was evident the designers had captured the interest of the design laypeople.

The *Last Supper*, by Quadrangle's Rick Mugford and Caroline Robbie, was, literally, a tongue-in-cheek look at the deliciousness of design.

Judith Mackin runs an interior design company, punch inside. You can follow her blog at [www.judithmackin.ca](http://www.judithmackin.ca), on twitter at [judithmackin](http://judithmackin) or email her: [judith@judithmackin.ca](mailto:judith@judithmackin.ca).



Flux Chair, now available in Canada, folds up like an envelope and expands into a chair, a great solution to small-space storage. For use indoors or out. Ah, those Dutch know how to design!

