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Full of life

White and beige are neutral, yes, but when paired with an array of textures and patterns, the scheme reads interesting and inviting. This new-build Vancouver home is the perfect example of light, bright and everything nice.

TEXT
BETH HITCHCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY
TRACEY AYTON



BRILLIANT: WHITE IN DESIGN

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COLOUR CHARACTER SOFT & SOPHISTICATED

Homeowner Monika Hibbs and her husband, Troy, decided on wainscoting in the front hallway to increase the architectural character of the new-build home. "We really invested in the details, from the moulding and panelling to the millwork," she says.

DESIGN, Stephanie Jean Design, stephaniejeandesign.com; **White Dove OC-17 WALL PAINT** (throughout), Simply White OC-117 **TRIM PAINT** (throughout), Benjamin Moore; **BENCH**, Stephanie Jean Design; **PENDANT LIGHTS**, Restoration Hardware.

“I STUCK TO A **WHITE AND BEIGE** SCHEME TO MAKE IT SIMPLE.”

In the dining room, oversized pendant lights were substantial enough for Troy and pretty enough for Monika. The dining table's weathered wood reflects the coffee table in the adjacent living room, while a white built-in cabinet at the end of the space seems to disappear into the wall.

DINING TABLE, Renaissance Home; **PENDANT LIGHTS**, Restoration Hardware; white **CAKE STAND**, Williams-Sonoma; **BOWLS**, Anthropologie; **CAKE**, Sweet Bake Shop; **COOKIES**, Whisk; **FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS** (throughout), Vivio Flower Gallery.

BOTTOM LEFT A large island was on Monika and Troy's wish list for the new house. The Carrara-marble-topped workspace also includes a gas cooktop and plenty of storage space underneath. To keep the look of the kitchen simple, they decided on Shaker-style cabinetry and polished chrome hardware.

RIGHT Initially, Monika wanted a marble backsplash in a herringbone pattern for the kitchen. But in the end, she chose a more budget-friendly subway tile. "It's our first home, so we did have to keep costs in mind," she says. "This is the next best thing, and it's also a classic." **VASE**, The Cross Decor & Design.

2012

wasn't just a banner year for Monika Hibbs – the stylish visionary behind the popular lifestyle blog *The Doctor's Closet* – it was more like a flashing marquee. Monika, a former doctor (hence the blog's name), and her husband, Troy, an entrepreneur, decided to build their dream home that summer. Just one month later, Monika learned she was pregnant with their first child. And then, to top off a roller coaster of a year, the couple moved into the house just two days shy of Christmas Day. "It was definitely crazy but so very exciting, too," says Monika, who's now the proud mother of 11-month-old Liam.

When it came to decorating their 4,000-square-foot four-bedroom abode in Langley, B.C., Monika struggled to narrow down her choices. With a blog that covers fashion, beauty, decor and the like, her daily exposure to trends didn't make the decision-making process easy. "So I stuck to a beige and white scheme to make it simple. Our motto was, 'If in doubt, pick white.'" To stay focused on the traditional-with-a-twist look she craved, Monika turned to her cousin Stephanie Giesbrecht, an artist and designer. "She was my go-to person to help polish everything off and give me confidence in the choices I was making."

The first big decision? To coat all surfaces in white, from the walls to the millwork. "We really →



Symmetry reigns supreme in the living room, where sofas flank a gas fireplace. "Having two couches keeps the room open," says Monika. "We liked this idea much more than bringing in a sectional and some chairs." The bench offers additional seating for entertaining.

SOFAS, Restoration Hardware; **COFFEE TABLE**, Renaissance Home; **SIDE TABLES**, Hudson's Bay; **DRAPERY, ROMAN BLIND**, gold **FRAMES**, Stephanie Jean Design; **BENCH**, milk glass **VASES**, The Cross Decor & Design; *Purist* **ARTWORK** (above fireplace) by Kim Giesbrecht, Kim's Paintings; framed **ARTWORK**, Sarah Swanson Design; grey patterned **TOSS CUSHION**, Arianna Belle.

“PEOPLE GET REALLY SCARED OF WHITE AND ASK, ‘HOW DO YOU KEEP IT CLEAN?’ AND I ANSWER, ‘WELL, I JUST CLEAN IT.’”

RIGHT, BOTTOM Monika puts her office to good use, working on her blog (thedoctorscloset.com) and online store (shopbymonika.com), where she sells her jewellery line, Bfriend, and other cute goodies. The white desk and Ghost-style chair are in keeping with the room's airy, feminine feel.

DESK, HomeSense; Ghost-style **ARMCHAIR**, Urban Barn; **POUFFE**, The Cross Decor & Design.

BOTTOM RIGHT The gold étagère creates a revolving display space for everything from personal photos to favourite books. Pink ombré drapes make a statement.

Love **ARTWORK**, MadeByGirl.

BELOW In Monika's office, a gallery wall represents the work of some of her fellow lifestyle bloggers.

"I love art with sayings - it can be changed with the season or my mood," she says.

BENCH, The Cross Decor & Design; *Hello Heart* **ARTWORK**, SS Print Shop; gold heart **ARTWORK** by Stephanie Giesbrecht, Lulu & Drew; *Non je ne regrette rien* **ARTWORK**, Sarah & Bendrix; acrylic **ARTWORK** by Jen Ramos, Cocoa & Hearts; **TOSS CUSHION**, HomeSense.



OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT The upstairs office is the most playful room in the house. "I wanted a pretty place where I could be inspired," explains Monika. The neon "by Monika" sign, custom made by a local company, is the perfect visual expression of her lifestyle brand.

SOFA, painted **NESTING TABLES**, IKEA; **POUFFE**, The Cross Decor & Design; neon **SIGN**, Endeavour Neon; gold-sequined "Love" **TOSS CUSHION**, Max & Me; floral **TOSS CUSHION**, Coco's Nest; pink trellis **TOSS CUSHION**, Arianna Belle.

RIGHT Monika and Troy agreed on a master bedroom that would be simple, gender-neutral and bright. "For both of us, this look epitomizes comfort," she says. A patterned toss cushion in the middle of the bed pulls together the room's varying warm and cool shades of white.

BED FRAME, Restoration Hardware; **BARBARA BARRY BEDDING**, Hudson's Bay; **LIGHT FIXTURE**, **HEADRESS**, Designers Guild floral **TOSS CUSHION**, The Cross Decor & Design; vintage Moroccan **WEDDING BLANKET** (used as throw), Beyond Marrakech.

made it white - everything but the floors," says Monika. For those, they went with engineered hardwood in a dark brown espresso stain to provide contrast. With the home's interior shell looking crisp and bright, they layered in subtle neutral patterns, weathered wood textures and comfy furniture that would make the house feel warm and cozy for the growing family.

In the open-concept living room, two linen-slipcovered sofas are styled with a selection of neutral-toned toss cushions to make the space inviting. A soft cream rug anchors the furniture arrangement, while a long upholstered bench adds extra seating when family and friends visit. Apart from white, cream, beige and black, there's not a colour in sight - unless you count the few gold metallic touches that lend a bit of glamour to the otherwise casual room. "People get really scared of white and ask, 'How do you keep it clean, especially with a baby?'" says Monika. "And I answer, 'Well, I just clean it!'"

If the home's main floor is an ode to neutral - including an all-white kitchen with Carrara marble counters - it's in Monika's upstairs office that the playful side of her aesthetic comes out. There are Moroccan pouffes, a gallery wall of witty prints, and plenty of gold and pink in varying shades to punch up the palette. By far, the most unique item is a neon sign of Monika's handwriting that says "by Monika," which is the umbrella brand for her blog, online shop and jewellery line. "I spend about three to five hours here each day, so it's important for me to have a place to escape and buckle down," she says.

With all the white in the rest of the house, why the splashes of hot pink here? "Funny you should ask," she says. "I call it my favourite undercover colour, because it does pop up a lot in my work." The pink is fun and a breath of fresh air, just like Monika herself. Given the way her blog's taken off in the past three years - and all the exciting changes in her personal life - we have a feeling 2014 will be anything *but* neutral.

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