

Preserved with a twist



by **Kristin Harold**

[View all articles from Kristin Harold](#)

Article online since September 11st 2007, 9:46

[Be the first to comment on this article](#)

Interior designer Penny Southam has fused the traditional arts and crafts style of her 95-year-old Hintonburg home with clean, contemporary lines.

When Penny Southam purchased her single-family home in Ottawa's Hintonburg area seven years ago, she knew she had found a diamond in the rough. With its original woodwork and linear lines intact, the award-winning designer and president of Southam Design Inc. has since made the most of its arts and crafts styling while adding the warm contemporary features she's known for. Penny recently sat down with Ottawa At Home to discuss how she's transforming her home into a restful retreat for her busy family, which includes five-year-old daughter, Kaleigh, and two-year-old son, Morgan.

OTTAWA AT HOME: What drew you to this three-storey home?

PENNY: My husband, Todd, and I really liked that all of the woodwork and the exposed beams in the dining room were what they would have been when it was built more than 90 years ago. It's really hard to find houses of that age where all of the woodwork hasn't been painted over or removed.

OAH: What's your favourite room?

PENNY: I really love the living room and dining room, and then of course the kids' rooms and the bathroom are favourites too. I also like the outdoor spaces that we've done, with the Nova Scotia slate flagstones we used on the front walkway and all of the plantings we've done in the backyard. I've just started to learn all about perennial gardening so every year I add more and I'm learning season by season.

OAH: What are your favourite pieces in the living room?

PENNY: Absolutely the portrait of my grandmother, Dorothy Southam – she was a driving force in my life and I was very close with her. I'm so lucky to have it and it's the focal point of the living room. It's the first thing anyone sees. I also have a few of her lamps and the needlepoint of the Rockcliffe home my grandfather, Hamilton Southam (who is known as the founding father of the National Arts Centre), grew up in. It's part of my history.

OAH: Your kids' rooms are very special – what gave you the ideas for the murals?

PENNY: The baby's room was Kaleigh's originally – hence the flowers, but we'll put some lions and other animals in there as Morgan grows up – and I wanted to do something unique, fun and interesting. A friend of mine and I painted it together. He did the tree and I filled in the flowers and birdhouses. The princess room is all about Kaleigh – she's five and, like every girl of her age, princesses are their main focus. That one was a lot easier to conceptualize and we hired a professional muralist, who was fabulous and completed it in only three days. I thought it would be really fun to build a little fort in her room. Given that she's on the third floor, we borrowed a little space in the knee wall to create her playhouse. We had a lot of fun with it.

OAH: The design for your upstairs main bathroom, which is less than seventy-five square feet, won awards for its creativity. What are its unique features?

PENNY: The bathroom is a room that's short on storage and a small space. We wanted something that's beautiful that showed some of the style I work with on a daily basis, but is also friendly for children. Storage-wise, the pull-outs behind the shower are a huge component and they're well used. The fun part is the integrated pull-out step so the kids can reach the sink. Every parent who has to deal with the rubber step stools knows what I'm talking about and I didn't want one of those in my beautiful bathroom. **The other standout feature is the custom glass panel that Delfina Falcao made. She's done some wonderful pieces for my clients and she's a fabulous artist.**

OAH: You're known for contemporary design in your work for clients, so what drew you to the arts and crafts style at home?

PENNY: What I do tends to be a warm contemporary – something that is comfortable for people to live in, but at the same time has clean lines. I love balance, proportion and how everything comes together in the details. Even though I tend to design contemporary, when you look at the arts and crafts movement, with Frank Lloyd Wright and McIntosh, it's all about detail, balance and proportion.

OAH: Are you seeing any changes in what your clients are looking for in terms of design trends?

PENNY: In Ottawa, I'm seeing a real shift to contemporary, much more so than even five years ago. You see that in residences and



Penny Southam, seen here with Darcy, her English springer spaniel, used warm tones to enhance her living room.

commercial applications – from restaurants to spas. More and more people are going to boutique hotels and they want to bring that home.

OAH: What's your next big renovation plan for your home?

PENNY: Definitely the kitchen. It's the one we inherited with the house and the initial plan was to renovate it within a year, but seven years later it's still not done. I'm so busy with work and my kids that I very rarely have time to get to my own personal spaces and the kitchen has been on hold for that reason. I could opt to do something more contemporary in it, but I've chosen to go with something keeping in the arts and crafts movement. I'll be using a Shaker-style door, old iron hardware and probably soapstone counters. We're hoping to do it next spring – it will be fabulous when it's done.