

*FOURTH OF FOUR PARTS*

# HIT THE DECK!

*One couple's former wreck of a deck is turned into three stunning functional zones*

*By Sydney Loney*

Mani and Nimmi just wanted to sit outside and look at the lake — without fear of falling in. The Pickering couple's newly renovated home backs on to a scenic expanse of Lake Ontario. The only problem is that the deck from which they wanted to enjoy the view was in rough shape and, thanks to a city bylaw, they were stuck with the existing structure: three rapidly rotting tiers that culminated in a rickety staircase leading down to the water.

Fortunately, Paul Lafrance, founder of Pickering-based Cutting Edge Construction and Design, likes a challenge.

The host of HGTV's *Decked Out* appeared on the scene, tape measure in hand, and assessed the situation. "It's a cool challenge," he told the camera, pausing when he encountered the stairs to the beach. "The words 'death' and 'trap' come to mind," he added.

The first step? Demolition of the old deck to see what lay underneath. Mr. Lafrance's crew pried up the old boards to reveal that the existing structure, although spider-infested, was sound. So, after shoring things up a bit, the crew got started on the transformation.

Mr. Lafrance's plan was to turn the three "boring" square boxes into functional rooms that flowed seamlessly from one to the other. The upper deck would become the barbecue and dining area, the middle deck would be a

shady spot for lounging, while the lower deck was to be an open sundeck.

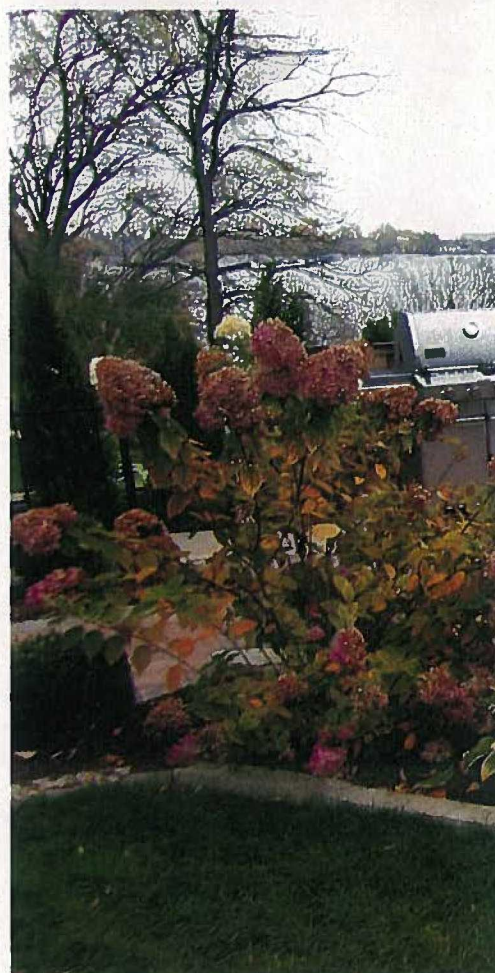
"It can be challenging from a design perspective to make a pre-existing structure look completely different," Mr. Lafrance says. He started by installing a low-maintenance composite deck using different colour combinations and patterns: fishbone for the upper level, parallel to the house for the second level and branching out from a square inlay for the lower sundeck.

For the main "room," he added an extra creative element, piecing together a nautical compass inlay into the floor. "I even checked it with my iPhone app to make sure it was true south," he says. "It makes a nice focal point and creates a fitting nautical theme."

The crew also widened the stairs to improve traffic flow and ensure the three levels didn't feel cut off from one another. Then, they added a curved pergola on the middle deck to create a visually interesting, shady space. It was designed to appear on a perfect plane with the horizon.

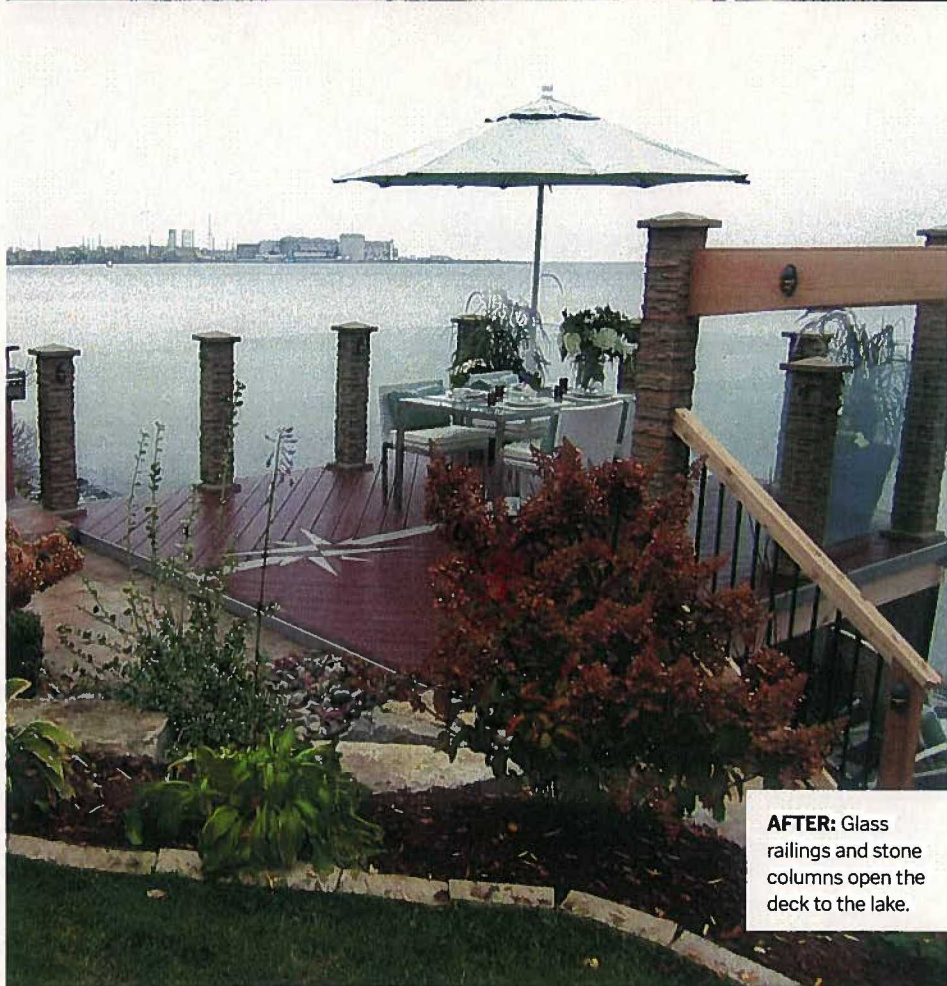
"The horizon is pretty much God's level, and you can't argue with that," Mr. Lafrance says. "If it was the slightest bit off, you'd see it, so it had to be perfect."

Finally, it was time to install railings. "The conventional approach would be to just bang





**BEFORE:** Original wood railings impeded the view of the lake.



**AFTER:** Glass railings and stone columns open the deck to the lake.

up some railings on the side, but that would only block the view,” Mr. Lafrance says. He had something else in mind.

Mr. Lafrance started with faux stone columns (to complement the stone finish on the house but made from high-density foam) and used them to mount glass railings that left the view unobstructed and gave the deck an elegant, contemporary feel. “The glass makes the whole area feel more open and the water feels even closer,” he says.

The deck’s proximity to the water also played a role in the decor. “Furniture placement was especially important,” says the show’s stylist Heidi Richter, owner of Toronto-based HR Design. “We wanted everything focused on the lake, so that no matter where you sit, you can see the water.”

She was also careful to circle the furniture around the inlays in the floor. “Paul loves inlays in deck design,” Ms. Richter says. “It’s always, ‘Don’t put a coffee table over my inlay.’ But it’s true, the goal is to accentuate, not impede.”

The colours in the flooring helped dictate her decor choices and she used grey cushions to match the accent colour Mr. Lafrance had incorporated in the deck.

“Because the deck was so close to the water, I wanted to create a beachy feel,” she says. “So I chose white as the base colour for the furniture because it looks light and airy and added soft blue accents, including a blue umbrella, to reflect the colour of the water.”

Glass urns filled with seashells and sand dollar-style paperweights (to hold napkins down in a breeze) continued the theme.

To tie the decor in with the glass railing, Ms. Richter chose a glass-topped dining table, opting for frosted glass because it doesn’t show fingerprints. She also matched the toss cushions she used in the lower lounge area to the striped placemats on the upper dining level.

“It can be challenging to dress different levels,” she says. “The key is to create continuity while still making each one feel like a separate room.”

When Mani and Nimmi were finally given a tour of their updated deck, they were overwhelmed by the transformation. “I have no words to express it,” Mani said. “It exceeded my expectations.”

And, Mr. Lafrance confided to the camera afterwards, it had exceeded his, too. “It’s pretty freakin’ cool,” he said. **PH**