



A Definition of Style

Melissa Davis talks about her 'mad love' for Hamilton, the importance of tidy and her favourite Sunday afternoons. By Victoria Ford

While calling Toronto's Queen West home for the past 15 years, HGTV and DIY networks' personality and Canadian design guru Melissa Davis has been spending increasing amounts of time in Hamilton. A self-proclaimed small-town farm girl, she's falling in love — “mad love” to use her exact words — with the resurgent former steel town.

“The thing I'm taken with by Hamilton is that it's a bridge between the cool, artistic lifestyle of Queen West versus the beauty

of a slower pace and a smaller feel, coupled with affordability,” Davis says. “There's this youthful infusion to the city. To me, Hamilton has everything.”

After 18 years in the same job, many may begin to feel a bit like a hamster in a wheel. Not Davis. Her energy and enthusiasm for design remains contagiously palpable. She sees the possibilities of good design, and the inspirations for executing an idea everywhere. From travel to nature to a quick stop at IKEA or

spotting a treasure in someone else's trash, Melissa is always open to the possibilities that surround her. And she's finding right now an amazing time to be a designer.

“We're in this time of anything goes,” she explains. “We've gone through periods of very distinct styles that I find date-stamp a space. Right now in interiors, as in personal fashion, there's a healthy mashup. All metals are in style, and from modern to traditional, and frilly to clean, everything is fair game and it's a fun time for designers.”

But, even in this era of design freedom, Davis finds herself bound by her own definition of style. Tidy.

“When I say tidy, I mean everything is there for a purpose,” she elaborates. “Through my

designs I try to ensure I have a balance of elegance and polish, but with these necessary, calculated imperfections that make the space approachable.”

This understanding of style as tidy is reflected in all things Davis. In her fashion, she leans towards simple and understated. “I'm a firm believer that people should notice you, not what you're wearing.” She uses the same principal in dressing — or designing — a space.

“Tidy is not all clean and cold, there are calculated and balanced imperfections.” It's these calculated imperfections — say a stain on a the marble top of a vintage side table — that make the space comfortable, warm and inviting, instead of a touch-me-not room that no one can live in. Through tidy Davis seeks to create a visual and physical balance in every space she touches.

As a design principal, tidy allows Davis to respect the space — any space — and it's function. She pays equal attention to negative space — something often overlooked by others in the design process — as she does to the things that fill it up. This allows her to work with clients in a way that gives them the form, function and style they want, while being unburdened by a specific style trend or strict conventions of what's currently en vogue.

With tidy, balanced and calculatedly imperfect at the ready, Davis approaches each project by first getting to know the client. She asks questions and works to help fit the puzzle pieces of style, design, function and form into a result that truly works for her clients. And her favourite space to do this in? The kitchen.

It seemed that for a while, the North American kitchen has been approached in a cookie cutter fashion. Think of many a kitchen you've been in, can you see the L-shape counters? The upper cabinets directly above the lowers? Yet, what about the people that use these pre-



determined, run-of-the-mill, builder-special spaces? Do they cook? Bake? Entertain? Knowing how the client uses the space, for Davis, is the key to unlocking its design.

"I love working through my design process in a kitchen," says Davis. "It's one of those rooms that if you think through the space and how you use it and the process of what will happen in it, you can make very nuanced choices that result in a big impact. I like that process. It's almost a mathematical equation on how to get the piece tougher to maximize functionality and balance and the end result can be dramatic. It's so rewarding!"

When you're ready to start your next design project, Davis encourages you to ask yourself: what do you want to achieve? Is there a problem to be fixed? Start there and begin to tidy things up. And most importantly, in this time of fashion freedom, do what makes you happy.



Getting to Know Melissa Davis



How do you take your coffee?

"Misto American with hot milk."



Go-to place to grab a bite?

"I live by the Drake Hotel and I eat there a lot!"

Favourite festival or event?

"I loved TIFF this year. I saw four films in two days!"

Who are you cheering for?

"I'll say the Jays, but I'm a nerd before a sports fan."



Favourite movie?

"Water."

Most iconic design piece of the last century?

"IKEA; They've built an empire on the notion of democratic design and scoff as we might, barely a home exists without at least one recognizable piece."



If money were no object, what would you buy?

"Real Estate in Hamilton. I'm not kidding! I was involved in *Income Property* for eight seasons and Hamilton is the perfect storm for real estate investing."



Favourite way to while away a Sunday?

"Sipping wine on a sunny patio while my son eats pizza across from me."