



Wiklém Design inc.:

Transforming The Waldorf Towers

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TRANSFORMING THE WALDORF TOWERS

For over a decade, the facades of The Waldorf Towers have turned heads from their home at Toronto's Bayview and Sheppard block. Thanks to a recent top-to-bottom renovation led by Wiklém Design inc., however, it's the towers' interiors that are now commanding attention.



The Waldorf was built as part of the larger New York Towers community – a development designed to give Toronto residents a sense of big city, cosmopolitan living just minutes from Highway 401 and the heart of Bayview Village. Inspired by Big Apple architecture, it features 529 premium condominium suites and a wealth of social, fitness, and multi-purpose amenity spaces within its East and West towers.

All combined, The Waldorf was a welcome addition to Toronto residents when it opened its doors at 2 and 8 Rean Drive in 2003. Nearly 10 years later, its owners, residents, and their Board of Directors saw an opportunity to breathe new life into the high-profile homes.

“It was time for a refresh,” says Bessie Tocchet, The Waldorf’s property manager with Maple Ridge Community Management (MRCM). Recalling the 2012 decision to launch what would become the largest refurbishment in the development’s history, she adds, “One thing led to another. At first we just thought we’d fix the carpet and do a little work here and there, but the more we saw what needed to be done, we realized it would be a better investment to do the whole thing.”

Indeed, what began as a desire to replace the towers’ flooring turned into a project that would see improvements made to virtually every inch of The Waldorf’s interiors. And while it would have been easy to ignore or delay some of the project’s more ambitious upgrades, MRCM understood the long-term benefits of a full renovation.

“These kinds of projects make the buildings look much better, and we always like to make sure the residents are getting value for it,” says Bessie, adding, “It was an investment we knew we needed to make.”



With the decision made and the reserve fund earmarked, The Waldorf's Board of Directors began their search for a design team that could spearhead the towers' transformation. They found that team in Wíklém Design, a Toronto-based firm led by Anita Wíklém with over 20 years of international interior design experience and a current focus on the Greater Toronto Area.

"Anita came highly recommended to us by a contractor we'd worked with before," recalls Tom Jacobs, President of The Waldorf's Board of Directors. "From the first time we met her, we were all very impressed with her enthusiasm and confidence. She just made us feel more comfortable about the direction she wanted for the towers, so we decided to go with her."

Wíklém wasted no time bringing its vision to the table and working with The Waldorf's key stakeholders to select their top design choices. Once the final plan was voted in by residents, Wíklém worked hand-in-hand with the project's general contractors to kick off a three-phase refurbishment that would bring exciting changes to every floor.



Suite corridors before



Suite corridors after

HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

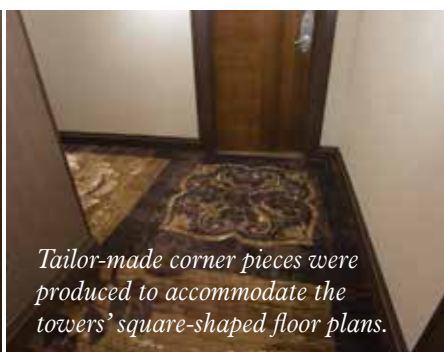
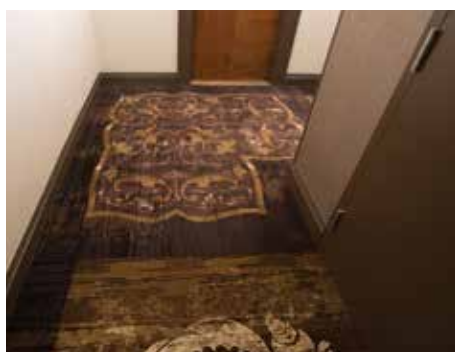
The first challenge for Anita and her team was simply determining where to start. And after early consultations with the board, the answer was clear.

"The biggest thing for everybody was the carpeting," says Anita. "It was so out of place for that building, the colour tones were off, and it just didn't say 'high end'. That was their first and biggest concern, so we knew that the carpets and suite corridors would be a good starting point. From there, we worked outwards to tie all the areas together while making sure each kept their own sense of identity."

For the corridors, that identity became one of contemporary class with traditional undertones. Richly textured and neutral-coloured carpeting was selected for the new flooring to compliment the existing suite doors and corridor hardware, which Wíklém was instructed to work around. Featuring an overscale and deconstructed acanthus leaf pattern, the carpet was laid in a continuous loop with no visible seams to wrap around the towers' square-shaped floor plan. Wíklém accomplished this by designing corner pieces and L-shaped pieces at points where suite doors were offset from the corridor.

"Those are the little details we had to work around to make the flooring feel natural and flowing," explains Anita. "As a professional design firm, we're experienced with these kinds of challenges. We know what issues to look out for from the start, so we can deal with them before we run into problems in the middle of an installation."

Elsewhere, crews installed new wall coverings throughout and refreshed the paint of the elevator bulkheads to a deep



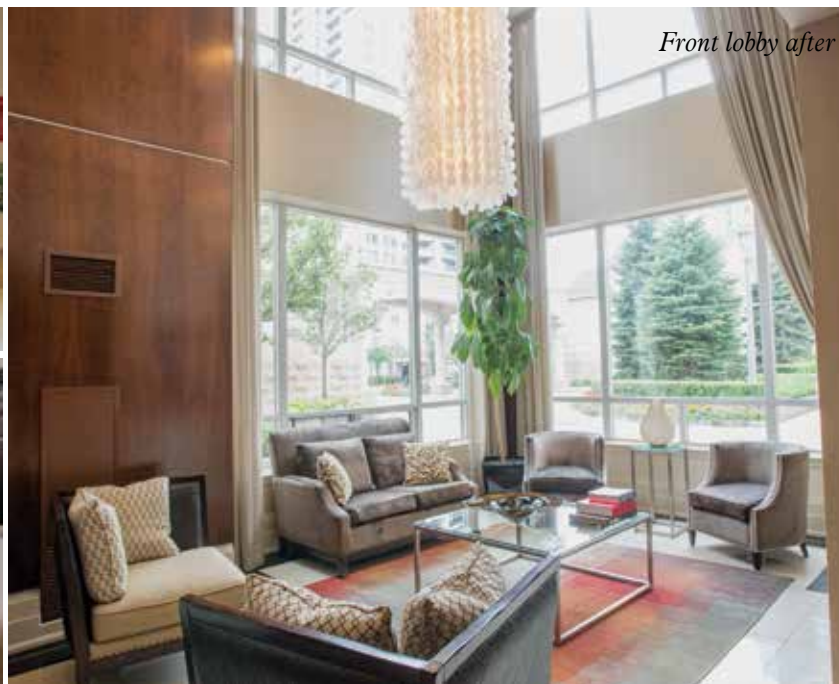
Tailor-made corner pieces were produced to accommodate the towers' square-shaped floor plans.



Front lobby before



Front lobby before



Front lobby after

espresso to match the corridor's new contemporary vibe.

As intended, this bold and timeless vision for The Waldorf's suite corridors laid the foundation for the other renovations to follow. These included the towers' front lobbies which, prior to Wiklém's intervention, fell short of taking full advantage of their spacious entrances.

"The floors were looking old, the wallpaper was outdated, and there was a mis-match of furniture and decorations collected throughout the years," says Anita. "There were so many different things going on, and together they just didn't do the grand feel of the lobby justice."

One of Wiklém's first moves was to create a bold focal point for the towers' two-storey grand lobbies. Within each, the existing fireplace was removed and a two-storey feature wall was constructed to house a new electric fireplace. In addition to creating a more intimate walkway to the New York Towers' nearby townhouses, the new wall pulled the space together by incorporating colours and woodwork that paid homage to the space's original carpentry and fixtures.

"When we do refurbishment projects, we have to design backwards to make it look like existing architectural or design choices were always meant to be there," says Anita, explaining, "So now, when you come in to the front lobby, you just assume that the fireplace has always been there because it just belongs. It was a big thing to do because it totally changed the look of the room."

Further transformation was achieved by replacing the flooring with marble-like porcelain tiles, complimented with natural stone inlays, applying fresh wall coverings, and repainting features throughout to pick up the room's darkly-coloured carpentry. To top it all off, contemporary furniture was placed alongside decorations such as art books, bowls, accent tables, and throw cushions.

"We didn't want that entrance space to look like a furniture showroom, so it was really important to focus on all those small details so that residents and their guests would walk into the lobby and go 'wow', because it's all finished to the last detail," offers Anita.

Speaking to Wiklém's eye for detail, she adds, "For all of our projects, we really

like to focus on those finishing touches – that last five per cent – and we make sure there's an allowance for them when we do our budgeting with the board."

For example, early designs for The Waldorf's lobbies included custom-made, hand-knotted wool rugs that Anita believed would blend perfectly with the new furniture and overall design. The board was shy to the hefty price tag at first, but eventually agreed after a test run.

"Because of its other expenses, the board wanted to be more reasonable with the area rug. But when they saw the quality and look of a cheaper option, they realized it didn't look good enough for the lobby that we were constructing," recalls Anita. "So I said, 'Let me bring you what I really want to put in there.'"

It was three times more money, but I knew it would be the perfect thing. I brought it in, asked them to live with it for a week and see what they

think. In the end, they loved it, and now they have really luxurious rugs in their front lobbies that are going to last them forever.”

Equal considerations were also made for the towers' elevator lobbies. For these, Wíklém drew its design inspirations from the main entrances by enhancing the space's wood columns and installing stone detailing at elevator entrances. Galaxy granite tiles with flecks of copper were also selected for the flooring, further picking up colours from the main lobbies and the elevator's copper-toned mosaic tiles.

The elevator lobbies were also adorned with full length mirrors, decorative tile patterns, and artwork which was both purchased new and acquired from other parts of the buildings. Reflecting on the former, Anita notes, “When we start a project, we go through all the areas that we're working on and we do an inventory of what they have. We take a look at what

“Now, when someone walks in they immediately get a sense of class and pizzazz, and they know this is a building that's well maintained.”

we can re-use, what's too dated, and what's broken, and once we find things we can use – like, in this case, the art pieces – we reposition them in their current rooms or move them to different rooms so they can feel new in those areas.”

The Waldorf's underground elevator lobbies also received an upgrade. Leaving the original wall tiling untouched, the team replaced the flooring with the same copper-flecked granite tiles as the elevator lobbies above.

Decals were also added to the parking garages' fire hose cabinets (as well as those

throughout the two towers) and permanent fixtures such as heaters and fuse boxes were painted out to create a sense of cleanliness and uniformity to the sub-level spaces.

“Most buildings forget about their underground lobbies, so they often look uninviting. When residents come home at the end of the day, or guests come to visit, and they use a car that usually means they often have to park and come up to the suites through an unfinished and unwelcoming entrance,” says Anita.

Reflecting on the upgrades applied to all of The Waldorf's lobbies, she adds, “Now, when someone walks in they immediately get a sense of class and pizzazz, and they know this is a building that's well maintained.”

THE FINAL PHASE

Renovations to The Waldorf's suite corridors and lobbies represented the first two phases of Wíklém's refurbishment. The third and final phase was conducted after a short break, and turned the spotlight on the high-rises' amenity spaces.

“Those first phases were a lot of work and both management and the board were all quite involved, so I'm glad they waited before going ahead with the final phase,” explains Anita. “It gave them an opportunity to take a break and enjoy the new renovations, which encouraged them to continue ahead full force with the final rooms and all the finishing details.”

The towers' shared party room was one of the key components of the final phase. Here, Wíklém worked around the room's existing crown moulding and window blinds to refresh the space with fresh paint and wall coverings, new millwork, custom artwork, and vinyl plank flooring.

Further functionality was added by using new card and bar tables with chairs



Elevator lobbies before



Elevator lobbies after



Party room dry bar and kitchen after



Party room after



Party room after



Billiard rooms after

to create sitting areas of various heights and arrangements throughout the room. Repurposed lounge chairs and fireplace from the former lobbies were also installed, alongside other finishing details such as a new area rug, toss pillows, and a new chandelier.

Additionally, the room's fully-featured kitchen was completely redone, outfitting the room with up-to-date appliances, an extended dry bar, and a new buffet counter with cubby holes for drinks and food storage. Lastly, Wklém addressed the board's desire for more storage space at the back of the room by installing an open closet space around the room's HVAC system.

"We created a free floating closet between two walls so that the vent could still have air circulating above, and we made a custom-cut shelf around the vent so that we didn't have to get mechanical involved, build a wall, or destroy the custom crown moulding. It actually worked out really well, since it saved us having to re-work mechanical systems, and it created a very practical space," explains Anita.

Phase three also included significant upgrades to The Waldorf's billiards rooms, wherein fresh carpeting and new wall coverings were used to bring a renewed sense of fun and energy to the underutilized space. Adding to this, Wklém refreshed the pool tables with blue felt and brought the room together with bar height chairs, custom art, and other creative flourishes.

"We wanted these spaces to be a little more bold and a little more fun," insists Anita.

Next to the billiard room in the East Tower, Wklém refreshed The Waldorf's meeting room with the same selection of tables and chairs used for the towers' party room. Other amenities, such as a re-purposed fireplace, mirrors, and other furniture, were also included to complete the space.

Beyond this, residents were also treated to newly renovated movie rooms within both towers. Herein, crews took down the heavy drapery on the walls and, after careful consideration, decided to remove old couches, rather than pay to have them refurbished.

"Whenever we have to think about things like buying new furniture or re-upholstering what we have, we do an analysis or a budget prioritization to figure out the most efficient strategy. In this case, getting rid of the couches and buying movie seating was definitely the better way to go," recalls Anita.

"We wanted the [billiard rooms] to be a little more bold and a little more fun."



Meeting room after

“Now, it's more organized and people can spread out if they want to do more activities like yoga, weight lifting, and stretching,” says Anita.

Last but not least, Wiklém had the younger generation in mind when it made creative use of the West Tower's hobby room, which was to be shared by residents from both high-rises. Eager to bring attention back to the underused space, crews removed an old library to make room for a new toddler play area, and repurposed old boardroom tables to create a communal homework zone.

“We wanted kids to come there to study and do homework after school; one where they could bring their iPads and computers and work, or other parents could bring toddlers and babies to play. Adults still have to be present, but now kids of all ages can utilize the room in a number of ways,” says Anita.

Wiklém decorated the room in custom-made artwork that picked up on the colours throughout, including the funky carpet tile patterns, colourful furniture, and playful toddler decorations.

The previous room's full length mirrors were kept to invoke a sense of space, while inexpensive accent tables



Movie rooms after

With the couches gone, movie theatre seats were sourced and installed. The rooms were then finished with new flooring, fresh wall coverings, and framed movie posters to create an authentic theatre experience.

Moving ahead, Wiklém also applied its creative touch to The Waldorf's fitness rooms. Rubber flooring was installed in each, and the walls were refreshed with light coverings and charcoal-coloured wallpaper along an accent wall. Crews also re-grouped the room's equipment to create specific zones for various workout activities and classes.



Fitness rooms before



Fitness rooms after

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Hobby room before



Hobby room after

and decorations were brought in to add further character to the room without stretching the board's budget.

"We painted out the walls, cleaned it up, and now it looks like a fun place to hang out," says Anita, reflecting, "It's very rare that you can do something like this in a condo so it was fun for us to do."

A CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Good things happen when teams are built on trust. And for Anita and her team at Wklém Design, the trust established between the board and management was critical to bringing the firm's creative vision to life.

"It was so refreshing to work with Bessie and the board. They listened to us, they discussed with us, and everyone was on the same wavelength. They trusted us to do our job, and with that trust came a lot of responsibility, so I enjoyed going the extra mile for them. They were



Hobby room's new toddler area

demanding, but they were so great to work with that you just wanted to go above and beyond at every step," admits Anita.

That trust, however, was built step-by-step through early collaborations between Wklém Design and all stakeholders.

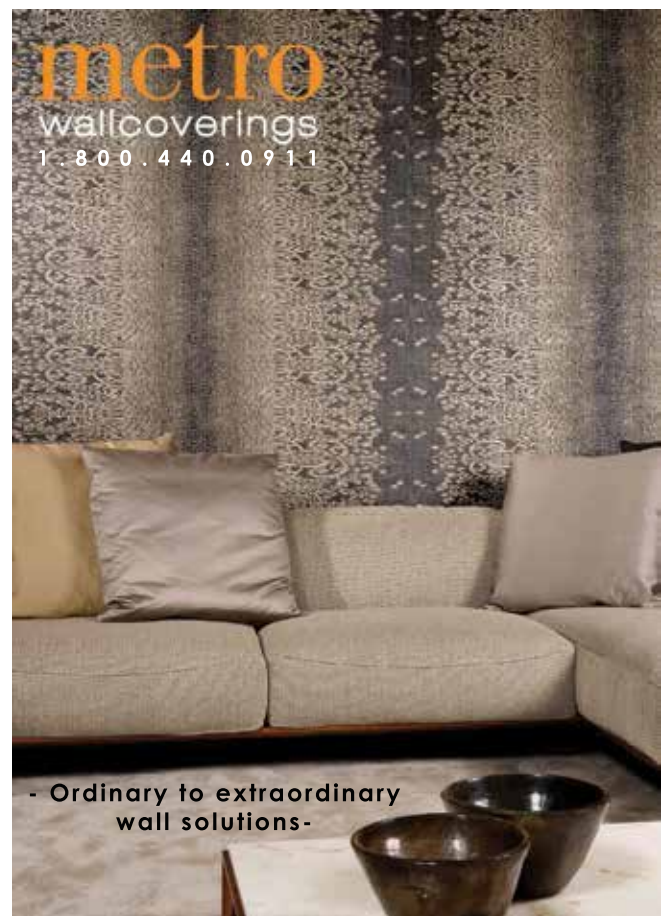
"She was very patient with us," says Tom. "She presented various options and we discussed them at length. There was even one point where we didn't like anything she showed us, and she was fine with that. In fact, she came back the next meeting with even more samples and new ideas. She was very accommodating and we got along very well."

No doubt, it was important for Wklém to pin down exactly what the board and its residents had envisioned for their home. That meant coming to meetings with a variety of ideas, putting together demonstrations throughout various parts of the building, and helping the board arrive at their final decisions, which were then displayed in the front lobby and voted on by residents at a town hall meeting.

"I always recommend involving residents in some form, because at the end of the day you are investing their money and they will always want a say," offers Anita. "They have to trust their board to look after their investment by keeping it current, and it's our job to assist the board with that by going through all their options, weighing the pros and cons, and helping them make those final decisions."

"It was a very positive experience. Wklém listened very closely to our needs and if there was something we didn't like, she was happy to accommodate us," adds Jean Wilson, with The Waldorf's Board of Directors.

Part of that accommodation meant being aware of the board's budget and planning the renovation in multiple phases so that they were easier to fund, and that there was ample time to plan.



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"The first thing we do when we get hired by board of directors is we do a preliminary budget to price everything out and come back to them to say, 'In a perfect world this is what we're looking at.' Most of the time, there's not enough money in the reserve funds for everyone to do what they really want to do, so the challenge – and opportunity – is in massaging those ideas and working back and forth to find the best possible solutions," says Anita.

Even when those solutions are found it's important to see them through. Understanding this, Winklém was on site throughout the entire process to ensure its vision was in the right hands and, when plans required tweaking, that someone from the team was there to consult with the general contractors on the changes.

"The design team was always there when we needed them," recalls Bessie. "Somebody would be here overseeing the work, and then there was Anita who would come whenever it was time to put up wall covering to make sure that it was the right material before they did it all only to have to tear it down again. It was very organized."

"She was very hands-on, she was here quite often, and we all got along very well," adds Tom.

Naturally, not all plans go off without a hitch. Here again, Jean says strong trust and communication saw all stakeholders through the challenges that came their way. "Anita had no problem dealing with changes. If we wanted anything to be changed, she would show us other choices and we would come back to her with approval or even other suggestions. Then, she and her team would take the plans away, work on them, and come back with what she felt we wanted – and that happened several times throughout the project."

It was this back and forth partnership that also helped the board stay up-to-date on the renovation's progress and keep residents invested in the project.

"It was important for us that we were letting everyone know what's coming next and what to expect, whether there was going to be dust, noise, or anything like that," says Bessie. "At the end of the day, everybody did their job. It was very organized and moved as smoothly as possible for such a large project."

CELEBRATING SUCCESS



It's been almost three years since Anita and her team put their finishing touches on the The Waldorf's interiors. Still, she looks back fondly on her time within the high-rises, and remains in close contact with management and the board to address any concerns or questions that have come up since.

"We're very pleased with everything, that's for sure. We always like to keep the building updated and make sure that the residents are getting value for it, and in our case the values have definitely gone up. It's been a great investment," says Jean.

That time has also given the board time to gauge the resident's reactions to the renovation. And that reaction, says Tom, has been positive. "We're all very happy with the final look. In fact, we have two buildings across the road from us with which we share a workout area and a pool and we've voted to bring Anita in on those renovations as well."

Sharing the well-deserved praise with her team, Anita says she's proud of what was accomplished in The Waldorf, noting, "It's a few years later and it still looks amazing. They invested a lot, but they got a lot of mileage out of their money."

Reflecting on the project in whole, she adds, "From what they had to what we were able to give them, it's been a welcoming transformation."

MADDAN GROUP

A photograph of a modern hallway with marble walls, glass doors, and a patterned carpet. The hallway is well-lit with recessed ceiling lights. The carpet has a large, intricate floral pattern in shades of brown and gold. The walls are made of dark marble with gold-colored trim around the glass doors.

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