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A GEM FROM THE '70S

Lobby refurbishment brings decades-old design into the modern era

The Birches is a 16-storey condo in the Dorset Park neighbourhood of Scarborough. When it was built 48 years ago, it was a showcase of 1970's-era design, with earthy colours, bold patterns, and even a groovy conversation pit.

BY ANITA WIKLÉM





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A BRAND NEW LOBBY AT THE BIRCHES; THE SEATING AREA BEFORE RENOVATIONS; A CLOSE-UP OF THE CURVED FEATURE WALL.

As the years passed, design elements were removed and added, giving the lobby a dated look. The space needed a refresh, and the board of directors and owners were ready to transform it into a modern, welcoming, and stylish space.

Honouring the original architecture and building envelope, the condo was perfectly primed for a '70s revival.

The primary goals among the owners were to keep the building secure and add privacy. The street entrance doors have been replaced with sliders into the vestibule and the intercom system and a single-latched door connecting the vestibule to the lobby offer security

and ease of access for residents. A new privacy screen with a semi-opaque tree branch design subtly reflects the condo's name while hiding the elevator lobby that was once visible from the street.

The tired travertine that had blanketed the lobby is now covered with a clean, warm white porcelain slab that echoes the grandeur of the original stone with a light, modern spin. The striped pattern of the porcelain tile on the floor adds movement and a touch of luxury and elegance.

A low dividing wall that once barred access to the sitting area was removed to alter the flow of resident traffic and create a grand, open feeling. The built-in seating, while

in step with a '70s vibe, did not reflect a modern sensibility for condominium living.

An original curved feature wall is the star of the lobby and key to making an engaging first impression from the entryway. Before the renovations, the wall seemed hidden behind an unremarkable paint colour and outdated fireplace insert. A rich, dark paint colour and a modern, low-profile fireplace have revived the wall into a simple, bold statement piece.

A circular rug and ceiling feature, which reference the curved wall, anchor the lobby seating, which is graced in soft, neutral tones. A sleek coffee table and a console with a mix of metal and natural stone finishes bring texture and interest.

“We’ve had only good feedback from the owners. They can’t believe it’s the same place.”



FROM TOP: THE FORMER LOBBY ENTRANCE; A BIRCH-INSPIRED PRIVACY SCREEN NOW HIDES THE ELEVATOR LOBBY.



To update the lighting, energy efficient and stylish options replaced antiquated fixtures. A chandelier suspends over the seating area to unify the setting and ensure well-distributed illumination throughout the space.

The design team opted for neutral colours like grey, ecru, and white to produce a bright and contemporary atmosphere. Adding powerful accents with dramatic 1970’s brown tones and subtle pops of colour in the artwork creates visual appeal. Accessories with various finishes and textures infuse character and warmth into the space.

All of these elements bring the design together with a renewed, sophisticated '70s sensibility. “We’ve had only good feedback from the owners,” says Dave Franklin, president of The Birches board of directors. “They can’t believe it’s the same place. The end result is exactly what we wanted at the beginning of the project.”

The updated lobby now feels cohesive and inviting and offers a contemporary and practical area for residents and guests, while maintaining the building's functionality and security. □

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