

## THE CREATIVE CURRENT

### Tanya Collins: Family heritage, intuition, and an open-heart guide her creative path

By Vanessa Coplan

As an Old Ottawa South resident you are likely familiar with the name Tanya Collins, or her pink and black signs with her company name Tanya Collins Designs. Tanya is a well known interior designer in and around Ottawa.

A typical workday for Tanya looks busy, stoking and managing creative fires. Her workday typically starts with client meetings at 9 am. When not consulting with clients she is

trying to ascertain what the people like. What drives them? What inspires them?

Tanya's path to a career in design was non-linear. Following in the footsteps of her siblings who are now doctors, Tanya got an MA in science. She was also an avid athlete. It was during university that she met her husband John. When they settled in Ottawa and had a family, Tanya got a diploma in naturopathic medicine and yoga teacher training level 1.

Life changed when John was diagnosed with Leukemia, which proved to be terminal. After some time had passed, Tanya got into design work by helping her landscaper and a neighbour with work on a yard, and then an interior renovation. Tanya describes this period after John's death as "the heavens open[ing] up and this design business was born." Her reputation grew by word of mouth, but before too long the media got involved



Tanya Collins.

PHOTO BY GORDON KING PHOTOGRAPHY

either advising her engineer or her draft person on proposed layouts or architectural details for renovation projects. She also manages projects by making site visits to inspect work, or speak with general contractors when problem solving is required. She provides concepts for custom furniture, case goods or built-in cabinetry, sources finishes for kitchen, bathroom or whole home renovations. She also sources furnishings and other decor items, and installs them.

When our talk turned to issues surrounding creativity Tanya spoke about the relationship between creativity and beauty, the ability for creative people to see beauty all around them. She describes herself as a feeling and intuitive person who listens to her "gut." She applies this directly to her work when she describes experiencing an interior space as something that moves her, that she has a reaction to, and she wants to make her clients feel that same energy. In order to "read" people and get in touch with exactly how they want their space to feel Tanya talks about the psychological elements inherent to her job. She is constantly

and she was featured in Ottawa Life Magazine.

On her design work Tanya says, "starting out I had no portfolio, so people came to my house to see what I could do. Kindness in people in the community around John's death motivated already deep connections to this area, and fueled my work life here."

Being a self-taught creative, I asked Tanya if she felt that going to school would have gotten her to where she is today?

"No. I am free to do things my way. I operate from my heart and my gut. I am good with people. I understand people. It sets me apart. It's not just about design jargon, but about knowing people, and coupled with [collaborative] creative energy makes me successful. I had to be confident in myself. I feel this is my purpose; this is where I need to be. The life I am living is great. I still love it. Short or long term project, I like to help them see what they may not be seeing. A satisfying process for both of us, collaborative."

Tanya continues, "I have always followed my heart. If you are aligned



The Hasek Villa, built in 1931 for Tanya's grandfather Jaroslav Hasek and designed by the architect Henrich Lauterbach. PHOTO BY MARTIN VESELKA

with your heart, whether it's a conventional or educated approach, or on your own, you take pieces of wisdom with you wherever you go."

Tanya attributes her creative and innovative spirit to her grandfather and her uncle. Her grandfather, Jaroslav Hasek, was a Modernist pioneer in the Czechoslovak Republic during the 1930's. He commissioned Functionalist architect, Heinrich Lauterbach to design the flat roofed Hasek villa, in 1931.

After the war, when the Communists took over in the 1950's, the family moved to New York City. They then bought land in Pickering Ontario and farmed. The creative flexibility needed to successfully move from a cultural rich central European lifestyle,

where he was part of the avant-garde movement, to big city North America, and then to farming in Pickering is paramount. In Pickering the family shifted gears and lived modestly but free. Her grandfather sold the Pickering farm in the 1980's and moved to Vancouver – always forward thinking.

Tanya's uncle is an antique dealer in Toronto. At an early age Tanya was exposed to different pieces and time periods and got an education in history and art from the family. Tanya says, "I am not trendy. I am not trained. I am a self-taught designer."

Vanessa Coplan is an artist, art teacher, creative coach and a resident of OOS.

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