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ROBERT LEDINGHAM MEMORIAL AWARD

In Living Colour

Calgary designer Kevin Mitchell balances the bold and the beautiful in his interior designs.

BY ANICKA QUIN // PORTRAIT BY COLIN WAY

» Kevin Mitchell has a knack for convincing clients to take risks. Conventional wisdom says that if you’re going to invest in a renovation, you want to play it pretty safe: neutral colours, widely appealing finishes, quiet furniture selections.

Not for Mitchell’s clients. One home features both a dramatic chair made out of orange seat belts, and a Missoni wall-to-wall carpet featuring stripes of blue, orange

and yellow. In another, a master bathroom is completely covered—ceilings, too—in silver leaf. The shower is boldly tiled in grey-and-white plaid.

There’s no doubt Mitchell’s way with clients played a strong role in his clinching the Robert Ledingham Memorial Award for an emerging designer this year. From his home base in Calgary, he’s creating livable spaces that are creatively unique, and yet ultimately appealing to yes, even those risk-averse future buyers—a rare talent that judge Paul Lavoie referred to as a “remarkable sense of vision.” Judge Kelly Deck notes the “depth and sophistication” to Mitchell’s work. “He clearly understands luxury and seems quite masterful at creating it through the entire design process,” she continues, “from interior details to art selection and styling.”

Mitchell started his career in the late ’90s as a visual merchandiser for department stores like Eaton’s and Sears, moving on to the now-defunct Caban—where, through friends, he would meet his future employer, Calgary’s Douglas Cridland, as the much-lauded designer was strolling through the store. After a short stint at NAIT in Edmonton, Mitchell enrolled in the interior design program at Mount Royal and reconnected with Cridland for

his practicum; he became a full-time designer with the team by the end of his degree.

While fearless colour would appear to be a signature design statement for Mitchell, he argues that each space is unique. “I’m drawn to clean lines and the functionality of the space,” he explains. “But colour-palette-wise, I’m all over the map.” One space featured a pale backdrop with boldly coloured furniture pieces; another residence, designed for clients whose children had left home, was a rich palette of greys, charcoal and warm taupes, with accents of yellow and textured pattern.

After nine years with Cridland, Mitchell is taking the bold step of moving out on his own and launching his own company, Mitchell Design House. “It’s the scariest thing I’ve ever done, becoming an entrepreneur,” says the designer. He’s working closely with a custom builder to complete several spec homes in Calgary, and, perhaps his biggest challenge, designing a home for himself. “I’m exposed to so much every day, and there are a thousand different directions I could take with my house,” he says. “You become your own worst client. I’ve changed the finishes in my bathroom about seven times—if I’d been my own client, I would have fired myself by now.” **HL**

Colour and Confidence

The chair made of orange seat belts that Mitchell selected for his client’s home (above, centre) was spotted on a trip to L.A. The same home features a flex space on the lower level: it’s a garage, but it can also be converted into a luxe dining room when the client hosts dinner parties of 30 or more. The vintage industrial moulds in the home office (above) were a find in Palm Springs.

Centre: Chris Sattlegger; right: Robert Lememeyer