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## **Creative Spaces: The Gracious Apartment of Kelvin Browne, VP at Royal Ontario Museum**

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**Kelvin Browne is a museum executive and a writer on fine arts and design, but his 9-foot-ceiling, light-filled Toronto apartment, as tasteful as it is, is nothing so formal as a museum. Kelvin and his partner have been collecting both art and antiques for years, favouring contemporary photographs and paintings, Chinese ceramics, and furniture with a time-honoured patina. Each piece has its own character and story, creating an overall effect that is elegant, quirky, and above all, comfortable.**



*Living room*



By: *Rana Florida*, [Creative Class Group](#); [Special Contributor to HGTV.ca](#)

**Who:** Kelvin Browne, "I'm Vice President, Marketing and Major Exhibitions, at the Royal Ontario Museum. I'm also a writer, most of the time for my Right Angles column in the National Post, but I have also written columns or free-lanced for Toronto Life, Azure, Globe and Mail, House and Home and other publications (I was also the first editor of Gardening Life, for Lynda Reeves). My book about the architectural history of the ROM, *Bold Visions*, was published four years ago. [[Available at the ROM bookstore](#)]

**What:** A classic New York-style apartment in a historic building in central Toronto, approximately 2200 sq. ft. Kelvin describes it as having great proportions, with 9 ft. ceilings and windows on three sides. The apartment has two and a half bedrooms, two bathrooms, a fireplace, and a small balcony that's big enough for a marine bbq.



*Kelvin Browne with his antique parrots*

**Rana Florida:** *Why did you pick this location and when did you move in?*

**Kelvin Browne:** We moved in last April. It's an area I was familiar with as fifteen years ago I lived a block away at another historic building with wonderful spaces. But mostly we picked this location because the apartments are so remarkable. We rented because we sold our place in the country and our city condo, and didn't want to rush to buy something in Toronto. We like this place so much, we might have given up looking to buy, at least in town.



*Living room*

**RF:** *What's the history of the building and did you change the apartment in any way?*

**KB:** The apartment was built in 1928. It's a rental, so we haven't done too much in terms of renovation. The closets were large but inefficient; High Tech rebuilt them. We added quite a bit of contemporary lighting (Eurolite) and ceiling fans (Design Within Reach). And paint, lots of paint, all Farrow & Ball. If we stay, we'll likely upgrade the kitchen counters and floor. People tend never to move out of the building and invest in their suites, even if they are rentals.



*Dining room detail; hallway*

**RF:** *In your day job, you work with major collections -- how did you decide on the pieces and collections you brought into your home?*

**KB:** We have three different kinds of collections, although that makes them sound grander than they are. My partner and I like contemporary photography, particularly black & white (we have a few smaller paintings too, mostly by friends.) I like antique furniture and I'm especially drawn to idiosyncratic chairs of all kinds. We also, in the last five years, have been purchasing Chinese antiquities from the Han and Ming periods, mostly in Hong Kong, although my current obsession is Qing Dynasty parrots.



*Dining room*

***RF:*** *What do you look for in furniture? Where do you find such unique and interesting pieces?*

**KB:** A combination of elegant proportions and a quirky, one-of-kind quality. I'm drawn to furniture with personality, character. I never try to buy anything to fit a specific space, but rather stuff that "speaks" to me. We're always looking for furniture, although we don't have room for much more and, in fact, have too much in storage already. I've been buying online lately. The Cherner chairs around the dining room table were mostly bought as singles through eBay.



*Main hall with Chippendale sofas (in blue)*

**KB:** My favorite pieces are the Chippendale sofas in the hall. One is historic, from the 1700s; the other is a copy to match, circa 1930. They came from an august Toronto family estate. Another favorite is the Japanese wallpaper screen, which is early 19th century. That it survived is a miracle.



*Japanese wallpaper screen; ceramic figure*

***RF:*** *Your artwork big and small is a focal point throughout the home. Do you have a specific vision with which you approach your art collection?*

***KB:*** I don't think there's much of a vision. We tried to be disciplined collectors fifteen years ago, but I found it boring and kind of pretentious. We donated some of our serious, vision-driven purchases to the Art Gallery of Ontario. We basically buy what we like now, and try never to think of resale or investment value, or whether it will match the carpet or otherwise work as décor. If I had to generalize, I tend to like realistic or romanticized images.





*Living room detail*



*Bedroom*

**RF:** *Where is your favourite spot to relax and read a book?*

**KB:** I like to read in bed. My favourite room is the smallest room, aka the former maid's room. We use it as an office.



*Office*

**RF:** *Do you have a decorating ethos of sorts?*

**KB:** I think it's about unique pieces, collected over time. Many have traveled from house to house, and apartment to apartment. They seem to combine differently as we move, so they're like friends you take with you; they remind you of who you are. I like smaller scale upholstered items (not exactly a theme) and love chairs of all kinds. I like a mix of old and new and prefer the old with lots of patina, not too refinished.



