



TRUCK-BUILDING PLANT

LOCATION: Corktown

BUILT: Circa 1930; it's also been a metal-working shop and taxidermist's lair but had been unused since 1968

OWNERS: Adam Thom and Katja Aga Sachse Thom, sculptors and principals of architecture firm Agathom

COST TO BUY: \$325,000

COST TO RENO: \$75,000

The word "building" is a charitable term for the mouldering disaster area the Thoms first saw in 2000. Rain poured through a rotting roof, birds were nesting in rust-eaten beams, and a fetid polar bear skin (a remnant of the taxidermy shop) lay tangled amid a burial ground of random metal springs. The couple was seeking a morphable space that could multi-task as home, office and atelier; they had big dreams and a small budget. "We had to look for buildings in states of decay just to get into the market," explains Adam. His father was an architect, and Katja's father built her family home out of a defunct dairy in Denmark. Perhaps it was genetics that gave them the courage to tackle a less-than-homey edifice.

They began their hands-on reno in 2003; it's still in progress, but nothing like their first days in the space, when plumbing was non-existent and finding a working toilet was an excuse to meet the neighbours. "That was our pioneer phase," Adam says. He waxes poetic about the home's entrance, now a drive-in studio with 16-foot ceilings—for him it was always a "sculptor's dream," though Katja is more prosaic. "It smelled like a barn," she remembers. Also home to the Thoms' two young daughters, the place hides in a laneway off King Street East and is as steeped in silence as a rutted country road. "It feels like we found a forgotten corner," says Katja, with the pride of an explorer.



1. Only outer walls are drywalled. Inside, dividers are made of cedar, and frameless like the originals. This one serves as a **giant bulletin board**.

2. The **dog's** name is Smukke, which means "beauty" in Danish.

3. Given to the couple as a gift two years ago, this 1960s **Eames table** has cast steel legs and a mahogany veneer top.

4. The **steel beams** are the building's originals. "We wanted to keep the lush, rusty red," says Katja.

5. "It's in the heart of the room. That's where fireplaces ought to go," says Adam of the Norwegian **jøtul stove**.

6. The first piece of furniture that Adam ever bought was this **drafting table**, snagged in 1986 at ArtCraft sign-painting shop.

7. West coast artist Jack Shadbolt did this **painting**, a view of Kitsilano. It once hung above Adam's father's desk.

8. An architectural mentor gave Adam this **drafting stool**.