'The living room is so cozy and contemporary – every single detail is so thoughtful and stylish. It's truly transformed my working life in Toronto,' says Jann of her condo. A standout feature is the custom artwork by Johanna Reynolds, who listened to Jann's music as inspiration while creating the vibrant piece.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

From concrete to cozy! How Tommy Smythe and Laura Fremont turned Jann Arden's condo into a one-of-a kind retreat

You might recognize Tommy Smythe by his bold glasses and memorable stints on HGTV. But in 2020, the Toronto-based television personality embarked on a new chapter, co-founding TOM Design Collective alongside Lindsay Mens and Kate Stuart. "We operate as a collective, led by designers who each bring a unique approach," Tommy tells *Hello! Canada*. "So whether you're an individual, a couple or a family, we have someone who specializes in your needs and who you are design-wise."

Shortly after launching his new venture, the interior design star got a call from a friend looking for a revamp. That friend was Jann Arden. While the singer-songwriter, actress and animal-rights advocate hails from Calgary, she's spent much of the past 25 years working in Toronto, often living out of hotels. "It became harder to find places that were affordable, comfortable and dog-friendly," says Jann, who frequently travels with her beloved pups, Poppy

‘IT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE I’M IN PALM SPRINGS AND NEW YORK ALL AT THE SAME TIME, AND YET IT REMINDS ME OF ALL THE BEST THINGS ABOUT BEING HOME’ *Jann Arden*

Designing the condo through a cruelty-free lens was a collaborative effort. ‘When you have a marquee name like Jann, people go the extra mile,’ Tommy explains, citing companies like Montauk Sofa, which provided vegan-friendly options for the project.

and Lorelai. During the pandemic, she decided it was time for a permanent solution. “I basically bought a concrete box, and it was as depressing as you can imagine,” she says of her stark city condo.

That’s when Tommy and fellow designer Laura Fremont stepped in to work their magic. “The condo felt chilly and cold – completely opposite to Jann, who’s warm, vibrant and bursting with personality,” explains Laura. “Our challenge was to infuse her energy and love of colour into the space without tearing everything apart.”

But as if sourcing materials during a global pandemic wasn’t difficult enough, there was one more request: to create a completely cruelty-free condo using no animal products whatsoever. “Jann and I are both ethical vegans, so she asked if I thought it was possible,” says Tommy. “I wasn’t entirely sure, but I told her I’d like to explore it and see if we could do it.”

And what he did was transformative. “I actually cried when I walked in the door for the first time,” Jann tells *Hello!* “Tommy and his team came in and absolutely surpassed all my expectations.”

Here, the design duo open up about bringing Jann’s vision to life.

How do you strike that balance between working with the client’s vision and your creative intuition?
Laura: It comes down to trust. With this particular project, Tommy and Jann were friends and I knew her from a previous career, so we were already ahead of the game. But there’s always that element of wanting to push them a little bit outside of their comfort zone, so trust is very important to take them to the next level.
Tommy: Sure, we were friends. But the design of a home for a person can be more intimate than a friendship because you learn about a person’s alone time, as well as the spaces that they would like to share with loved ones, so Laura and I listened – a lot.

How involved was Jann in the design? Very. Jann’s an artist, so she understands the creative process – and in order for us to be engaged, we needed to be encouraged. I’ve always said, “I like a little bit of punk with my pretty,” and I would say that if you had to describe the way that Jann physically presents, it’s that. She’s not a girlie girl by any stretch, but she doesn’t mind a little pink.

Do you think you were able to push the boundaries a little more because of your friendship with Jann? Yes! But also, I think because this isn’t her principal residence, there is a tolerance for pushing the envelope. I used to say to her, “You’re here for a good time, not a long time.”

What were some of the elements Jann wanted from this space? Her primary residence is in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, while this condo serves as her second home, located in a big city where she does a great deal of business. For starters, she wanted something that felt more personal than a hotel room. Another one of Jann’s instructions was to be sustainable and use Canadian-made goods whenever possible. An added layer was that she wanted to make the space cruelty-free. That was a new challenge, but one that Laura and I jumped into enthusiastically.

The condo’s cool colour palette is so appealing. What was the inspo?
Laura: Jann has an existing art piece – now in the kitchen – and it served as the jumping-off point. From there, fun was our anthem! In the kitchen, I had always wanted to do a checkerboard tile pattern in a bold colour, and Tommy was game. We played around with pattern for the rug, artwork, fabric on the chairs and floral drapery – nothing really goes, but it all works.

Speaking of artwork, can you tell us about the custom piece? Johanna Reynolds – the artist who painted the piece – used vegan, plant-based paints and pigments, which was a level that we never even asked her for, but she took the commission to heart. She also exclusively listened to Jann’s music while she painted.

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