Dr. Kenneth Montague’s Toronto loft is both home and art gallery—and the ultimate party house, thanks to two kitchens, a rooftop deck, and no shortage of conversation pieces.

As told to Alex Bozikovic
Photos by Naomi Finlay
A Vespa-riding dentist and curator, Dr. Kenneth Montague is one of a kind—and his home is equally unique. His office treats top Canadian creatives, and after hours he heads Wedge Curatorial Projects, which produces exhibitions and discussions with artists who focus on black identity. Here, he tours us around his penthouse near downtown Toronto.

This place is a reflection of the duality in my life. I’m a dentist, and also I have this work with Wedge as a collector, curator, and collaborator. I started the gallery in another apartment, where I lived in the late ’90s, a really minimal loft. It was awesome, but it didn’t work for me. I’m a collector, and I’ve gotten to a certain age where I just accumulate things. Then I found David Anand Peterson, an architect who was designing this six-story courtyard building. I worked with him to customize my place, basically to design it from scratch. He came up with a layout based on how I live that makes the house a mixture of public and private and inserts living and gallery space throughout the two levels.

We made an early design decision to reverse the traditional order of the and kitchen, alongside a Finn Juhl dining table, vintage Arne Jacobsen chairs, a Nelson Platform bench, and a sculptural chandelier by Omer Arbel for Bocci.
At a recent gathering, a reception for the staff and friends of the Ryerson Image Centre, a photography gallery and research facility set to open in Toronto in late September, guests mingled on Montague’s 1,600-square-foot roof deck (top) and admired his collection of contemporary art. Montague, an avid musician, keeps his guitars at the ready (above right) and approaches parties as “a hybrid experience where the music mix goes from Alice Coltrane to Afrobeat to Arcade Fire.”

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space, to guide people right upstairs, bypassing the private first-floor bedrooms. That was because the roof deck and garden, that very big public area for entertaining, was on the second level, so we put the open-plan living room, dining area, and kitchen up there. There are two kitchens, actually: one outdoors on the roof, and one indoors, with this really industrial-looking Bulthaup island where I’m able to have a dialogue with guests while I’m cooking. I’ve got art in there on the counter, too. I really want to say to people, “Don’t take art so seriously.”

The rooftop deck was originally going to be for the entire building, but I made a deal to have it all for myself. There’s a barbecue out there, and this sauna that David designed. When I have friends over, we might go outside, have a drink, and go into the sauna.

Being a dentist and a collector are both important parts of who I am. I’m also on several boards of local and international institutions like the Art Gallery of Ontario, Tate Modern in London, and the Toronto Photographers Workshop. Last year I had a fundraiser for TPW at the house and had 60 or 70 people up on the roof. With all the lights and that view of the Toronto skyline, it’s a special place for a presentation.

Like most collectors, I have a lot of stuff: photography, paintings, sculpture, design objects, my collection of salt and pepper shakers, my records. I’ve got valuable paintings and historic photos next to tear-outs from magazines. These things all together tell stories and reflect my passion about black culture and about modernism. It’s a very intimate experience that I hope will help people leap to the idea that they can do it themselves. It’s not about income; it’s about a certain openness and a certain creativity in your life.

Even though this is an apartment, I think of it as a house; it has those qualities, with two levels and all the outdoor space. At 1,950 square feet, it’s large, but it doesn’t have many divisions. It was David’s idea to make the office double as a guest bedroom. If I have guests staying with me for a week, I give them their own wing of the house. They can sleep...
Montague Residence
Floor Plans

A  Patio
B  Open to Below
C  Bathroom
D  Living/Dining Area
E  Kitchen
F  Sauna
G  Outdoor Dining Area
H  Master Bedroom
I  Master Bathroom
J  Study
K  Library
L  Entry
M  Bedroom
N  Balcony

“When I have parties, there’s always something to get people talking.”

Architect David Anand Peterson designed the custom millwork and shelving in Montague’s kitchen. The stainless steel island is by Bulthaup. The stools are vintage and were designed by Erik Buck. Montague was thrilled to spot the same ones adorning Don Draper’s apartment in the latest season of Mad Men.
The kitchen (top left and right) takes on a gallery feel. *Shopping Mall Fruit Basket*, a painting by Peter B. Hastings, shares space with a special-edition Royal Copenhagen tea set and a photograph by Tokyo-based artist Keith Ng. In the library (above left), Douglas Coupland’s *Spectra* sculpture sits next to a century-old helmet mask from Burkina Faso. Montague arranges his objects with a sense of humor. Custom shelves (above right) display his collection of salt and pepper shakers.

there, enjoy the books in the library, get their food in the kitchen, smoke cigarettes out on the deck. It has worked well for family members, for friends, and for visiting artists.

I have two rooms devoted to books. The art library is by the front door, with books arranged by subject—African art, photography, and so on—plus a credenza by Castor Design and a collection of stools, a few of them from Africa. One is an Ashanti animal stool from Ghana and another is by a contemporary artist from Senegal, and it’s made out of an oil drum. Kids tend to hang out here on the stools. They’re comfortable, and they also say something about where contemporary art is at in Africa. The second bedroom, which also functions as a library, has Vitsoe shelving and houses my design book collection.

There’s a tour of the collection that I give that takes you from the front door, through the library, and ends in the living-dining area, where you see my Calder lithographs. Then I tell the story about my Uncle Charles and my Aunt Edith, who knew Calder and commissioned these pieces just before he died.

Along the way you pass my guitars, bass, and stereos. A lot of people—including my architect at first—don’t understand why I have the stereos out. He said, “Hey, why don’t you build them in?” But it’s a joy to me to have a place to put out these old tube amps. Music is an important part of my life. I have been in multiple rock bands and used to be in a reggae-rock group called One, playing guitar and trombone and doing some toasting.

When I have parties, there’s always something to get people talking. Just as often as it’s the art, it’s somebody looking at the album covers in my record collection. The house is a very naked expression of my self, and people relate it to their own lives. Gatherings here can be a very rich experience, a collective discussion around art history, music, food, and fashion. It takes on a sort of salon atmosphere. But the space is very homespun, even though it is also very contemporary. And that’s by design. It’s supposed to be a home first.
“Gatherings here can be a very rich experience, a discussion around art history, music, food, and fashion.”

Montague’s office (top) doubles as a guest room thanks to a Murphy bed that folds out to reveal shelves stocked with design magazines. The painting is *Untitled (Corner Rainbow)* by Elizabeth McIntosh. Books pepper the apartment, but most are housed in two libraries, one of which is dedicated to art and photography (above left and right). It also features a Palms lounger by Dutch designer Frans Schrofer and the painting *Any Number of Preoccupations* by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.
### Conversation Starter

To create an instant sense of warmth and intrigue in the entryway (right), Montague hung a remarkable artwork by Paris-based photographer Meyer that shows three African moviegoers looking upward. Just above it is a chandelier from Bocci, designed by Montague’s friend Omer Arbel. “That installation is really an encapsulation of my interests; it always inspires discussion,” he says.

bocci.ca
tendancefloue.net

### Hidden Storage

The Murphy bed in the guest bedroom sits behind Montague’s desk, allowing the compact room to function comfortably for working and sleeping at different times. It’s made with customized millwork, Häfele bed hardware, and an Ikea mattress. When it’s open, it reveals hidden shelving.

hafele.com
ikea.com

### Art of Lighting

In warm weather, Montague’s parties spill onto the roof deck. To encourage guests to explore, Peterson designed two built-in light fixtures, made from LEDs behind white acrylic panels, that cast a dramatic glow across the sauna’s custom-made wood door, designed by Peterson and crafted by carpenter Daniel Liebster.

dlfc.ca

### Going Vertical

In the guest bathroom, a mirror, soap dish, hand towels, and a tray hang from a modular floor-mounted Auto-pole shelf system by Alu. The hardware adds an industrial note to the look of the room and takes up less area than a cabinet. The wall and floor are clad in a stone called Indian granite.

alu.com

### Welcome Routine

Architect David Anand Peterson designed inset shelving right inside the front door to hold Montague’s bike helmet, hats, and keys. The coat closet, however, is around the corner near the guest bedroom; this allows Montague to immediately escort guests away from the threshold, avoiding crowding by the front door.

dpstudio.net

### Make It Yours

For more information and resources, see Sourcing on page 118.