

HOMES & CONDOS



Photo finish

Tips to stem the overflow of pictures, page 8



Sideboard serving

Seeing the beauty in a French Empire piece, page 2



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OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/HOMES

THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION I

Guiding the design



Sophisticated new design centres aim to make sense of all the options

SHEILA BRADY

Builders and designers are doing their best to simplify and centralize the often complex and sometimes frustrating world of designing and decorating.

Both large builders and smaller custom ones are opening specialized design centres and hiring staff to help buyers determine how and where to readjust walls, choose wall colours and decide between hardwood, tile and carpeting. Slowly disappearing are the days when buyers would hunker down with a sales agent in a bedroom of the model home of the month, choosing between a light beige or darker beige tile.

The emerging design centres complement splashy centres already offered up by kitchen heavyweights such as Deslaurier Custom Cabinets, Laurysen Kitchens and Astro Design Centre's multi-million-dollar showroom on an industrial street on the city's west side. And the new design centres are a variation on elaborate and highly successful ones already offered by Minto and Richcraft.

Last fall, Claridge opened a slick 3,000-square-foot design centre in Le-Breton Flats to help buyers of town-homes and singles, while Uniform Urban Developments opened a smaller, sophisticated, 1,200-square-foot design centre at its headquarters on Centrepointe Drive and Amsted Construction took the wraps off the first in a series of Living Rooms, this one off Carling Avenue, where its designers can sit down with clients who want to either renovate or build a home from scratch.

"It's like night and day," says Shawn



JULIE OLIVER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Claridge's new design centre focuses on a three-step process for getting the most out of the design and decor of a new home.

Malhotra, the driving force behind the 12 months of planning to open the \$500,000 Claridge Homes Design Centre. "Now there is a three-step process, setting down times and planning for structural and architectural changes, followed by the design process.

"There has already been a significant upsurge in buyers spending more money on upgrades," he says. "It's no secret that the whole point is to make more money."

Malhotra says there are plans to expand the design centre to cater to condo buyers, a substantial part of the builder's business.

See DESIGN on page 9



CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Continuity is key, says Patrick McCarron, who helps Uniform homeowners with their design choices.

Get design tips from the pros, page 9

PATRICK MCCARRON makes sense of design options in a video at OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/HOMES



Joel Weaver loved his St. George's Yard home but wasn't sure how to decorate it. That's where builder Uniform's design team came in.

Calling on the experts

Realizing he knew little about design, Ottawa surgeon turned to the pros

SHEILA BRADY

Joel Weaver is an expert with a scalpel, yet the young surgeon freely admits he's a novice when it comes to design and decorating.

He spends 80 to 100 hours a week at the hospital, with little time to track down the right place to live, let alone the perfect comfy couch for the living room in his brick home at St. George's Yard, an award-winning infill community by Uniform Urban Developments.

Therefore, it seemed elementary and smart to turn to the experts in 2009 when tracking down and then designing and decorating his sleek,

contemporary two-storey in one of the city's hottest west-side neighbourhoods.

"I had been renting since I was 18 and left home for school," says Weaver, now 36, who grew up in Nanticoke, a small farming community on the northern shore of Lake Erie.

See EXPERTS on page 3

TAKE A TOUR of Joel Weaver's design-assisted home in a video at

OTTAWACITIZEN.COM/HOMES

ON THE MOVE



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PHOTOS BY JULIE OLIVER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Joel Weaver was quick to focus on the kitchen of his Mayfair Avenue home, working with both the builder and designer Patrick McCarron to change the layout to better suit him.

Experts: Fine-tuning the choices

Continued from page 1

"I was tired of renting. I wanted to buy a home. It was time to put down roots," he says, while running his hands over the smooth granite surface of the kitchen cooking island that holds centre stage in his home.

Although paintings and prints still lean against the wall in the living room and the front office isn't quite finished, he can't seem to stop smiling. He's picky and would rather put off a decision if it isn't right, making sure to do it right the first time.

That means he'll continue to take his time in a project that started five years ago.

Weaver was renting a furnished condo after returning in 2007 from a stint in Calgary hospitals. He drew up a five-point wish list for a new address, including a single home with a two-car garage, air conditioning (he can't stand the summer heat), a deck for barbecuing and a location where he could walk to good restaurants and shops.

Real estate agent Judy Faulkner was first on the scene, pointing Weaver to St. George's Yard on Mayfair Avenue in Wellington Village.

He picked out one of the single homes, then Faulkner talked him into taking the one next door because the layout was better. "She was right," says Weaver, who leans toward contemporary lines, but admits he's conservative and has difficulty making up his mind when faced with too

many options.

Yet he was quick to focus on the kitchen, working with Uniform to change the layout around so he could cook at the island while watching the flat-screen television in the living room or talking with friends.

"The first design had the stove on a wall and you couldn't see the TV. You would get a crink in your neck, turning around," says Weaver, who proudly says he can take credit for redesigning the kitchen layout. He then worked with experts at Universal Appliances before heading over to Deslaurier Custom Cabinets and the tutelage of designer Kevin Rosien.

He also takes credit for wiring the house, or at least hiring experts to do the work, allowing him to control the security system, heating and the entertainment system with one master control. "I love gadgets."

The doctor found his design salvation when Uniform included four hours of advice with veteran designer Patrick McCarron in the purchase price.

"I'm conservative and Patrick figured that out very quickly. At first, he took out 15 to 20 different types of tiles," remembers Weaver. "It was just impossible. That's when he started with three or four tiles."

During one of the early consultations, Weaver discovered that the dark wood kitchen cabinet door he picked was called the McCarron, named by Deslaurier after the designer.



The living room is a mix of modern furniture and traditional artwork.

Surgeon and designer quickly narrowed down the choice of flooring (a warm maple hardwood and creamy porcelain tiles), wall colours (toasty grey) and Hunter Douglas blinds (no curtains).

Weaver took the next logical step, asking McCarron to help furnish the three-bedroom house. (He had a twin bed and a black leather sofa and chair, all in storage.)

Very quickly, McCarron sifted through his catalogues, assembling styles and fabric choices for a custom sofa and chair, hiring furniture maker JP Yelle to craft a Parson-style dining room table, two hourglass tables and a cabinet. Then he tracked down a pair of gorgeous Bernhardt wooden chairs that are part sculptural and thoroughly comfortable.

"It was all done and I didn't think about it much until moving day and the van came with all of the new furniture," says Weaver. McCarron even drafted a floor plan for the pieces.

"When it was all done, we sat down and had a beer," says Weaver. "It feels like home. It feels like us."



A curved light fixture over the dining room table adds contemporary flair.

ASK THE EXPERT LEANNE BROWNOFF

How practical are leather tiles?

At a recent home show, I saw leather tiles displayed. How practical are they?

Leather tiles are beautiful and have been shown to be a stunning option for both floor and wall applications. Regarding their practicality, common sense should prevail.

There are different manufacturers of these tiles; some are sourced from recycled leather and others from hide leather. The recycled leather

has proven to be as resilient as linoleum and have similar indentation/resilience properties to cork. Leather hides will show surface wear and patina over time, which could be a look you are after.

According to their manufacturers, these tiles have been used in all types of rooms, including high-traffic boardrooms and hotels, while still maintaining their beauty.

As a wall tile, this stunning cover offers a rich opulence to

any decor. It also offers sound absorption, which is often a challenge in contemporary designs using hard, minimalist furnishings.

Make sure to check the product care guides and warranties to ascertain possible limits to the tiles' application.

Leanne Brownoff is an Edmonton interior design consultant.

POSTMEDIA NEWS



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Design: Bringing choices to customers

Continued from page 1

Uniform Urban Developments, an award-winning builder with several small in-fill projects in its portfolio and a collection of large custom homes in Manotick, also decided late last fall to expand its design presence.

"We have opened Richardson Ridge, a community of 600 townhomes and single homes in Kanata," says Emily Meyers, Uniform's marketing co-ordinator and the energy behind the design centre. "We needed a better process to accommodate the volume of business we will be facing."

The intent is not to overwhelm buyers with too many choices, says Meyers, who collaborated with Danielle Hannah of 2H Design in creating the second-floor centre. "There won't be 16 different faucets.

"We wanted to show a few options and also stay on top of the trends." She says the displays will be switched up as Hannah and Patrick McCarron, a veteran designer and longtime consultant, make suggestions.



Amsted partners Kirk Haw, below left, and Steve Barkhouse renovated a house at Highland and Carling avenues, turning it into a consultation meeting centre called the Living Room, left.



PHOTOS BY PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

McCarron will work out of the centre with clients, giving them four hours of design advice as part of their home-buying agreement. The design centre will fea-

ture many of the popular items in Uniform's model homes, which are decorated by Hannah.

Spaces are smaller and more low-key at Amsted's

Living Room, a concept that is more about consultation than design centre. It was introduced last September by childhood friends and business partners Steve Barkhouse and Kirk Haw.

The Living Room, located on the main floor of a renovated house at 770 Highland Ave., is likely the first in a series of Living Rooms, with other locations planned for Beechwood Avenue and the Glebe, says Haw. The concept is about providing convenience to clients, so they can sit down in a comfy setting and review plans around a large table. A fireplace warms up the room, while a large flat-screen television can easily be programmed to show off detailed design plans for all to see and adjust.

There are no faucet options or tile samples. "We wanted a convenient place, so clients would not have to drive out to our headquarters on Flewellyn Road," says Haw. Amsted already operates a large design centre on Flewellyn.

Colleagues, including award-winning designer Chuck Mills, and Amsted design staff reserve the living room for client conferences.



JULIE OLIVER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

The Claridge Design Centre carries a myriad of options for flooring, fixtures and more. The company has plans to expand to cater to condo buyers as well.

Advice from the pros

SHEILA BRADY

Forget the deep-blue carpet, ditch the pink grouting and avoid fast-changing trends when designing a new house, caution designers and decorators who spend hours each day helping buyers after the sales agreement is signed and before construction begins.

Function comes before esthetics and longevity should always come before flashy colour choices, says Patricia Fox, a certified interior decorator at Claridge's smashing 3,000-square-foot design centre that opened last fall.

"Some clients listen, others do not and may regret their decisions," says Fox, who remembers an Eastern European gentleman who insisted on picking a terracotta tile and pink grouting for the entrance and kitchen floor in his townhome. "I convinced him not to go with pink grouting, but he really wanted the terracotta. He may regret the choice."

Fox has steered clients away from picking vibrant blue or green rugs, instead choosing more neutral benders. She remembers clear success with a professional couple who added their personality to a four-bedroom house after taking a fresh look at room functions on the main floor. They eliminated a breakfast area, enlarged the kitchen island and created a raised bar on three sides to suit their entertaining lifestyle.

The couple, with Fox's help, took over half of the family room for an expanded dining room capable of seating eight, while tacking on the

remaining space originally devoted to the family room to the living room, in the process creating a generous great room.

"It all worked because we blanked out the room names from the first, looked at their lifestyle and went from there," says Fox, who worked in the flooring industry for 20 years before signing up with Claridge.

"It is crucial to avoid trends," says Michael Courdin, owner of Michael Courdin Design and a veteran who regularly works with top architects on custom homes across the city. He also recently finished Claridge's model homes.

"Look for longevity in design and good proportions," he says.

Even more important is to look at the function of a room, according to a top kitchen designer and a 13-year veteran of Ottawa's design world.

"I start my designs by looking at the function and once you get that you plug in the finishes," says Valerie Blasioli, project developer at Amsted Construction and a regular at the company's new Living Room Consultation Centre at Highland and Carling avenues.

For example, she says, when designing a bathroom, figure out who is going to be sharing it. "If it's for kids, how old are they? Are they going to be using the space at the same time? You approach design by asking how the owners are going to live daily in the space, then you go into finishes. Otherwise, you are not going to be impressed with the room for very long."

Kevin Rosien, a senior designer with Deslaurier Cus-

tom Cabinets, agrees.

"The wow factor is important, but functionality is even more important. The wow factor is key to someone who does not cook and never will, but you need function; you need enough drawers for pots, to be successful."

There are some general rules such as lighter cabinets making smaller kitchens look larger, says Rosien, who has designed thousands of kitchens and bathrooms for buyers of sleek condos and ground-level homes by Monarch Homes and Uniform Urban Developments. It's also wise to put darker-coloured cabinets on the bottom and lighter cabinets on upper levels.

And continuity is a vital part of successful design, says Patrick McCarron, a veteran designer and consultant with Uniform. Pay attention to the flooring because it links spaces together and repeat tile choices at the entrance and in bathrooms to unify spaces, says the owner of Patrick McCarron Design.

The path to a successful design is also about long-term planning, says Blasioli. Designing a renovation or a new home is already stressful because of the many, many choices, she says. You can eliminate some of the stress by planning ahead and finalizing design choices, placing orders for everything from flooring to pot lights at least a month ahead of a construction start.

Then you know if a particular tile or sink is available and trades do not have to wait for the products during construction. "It makes everything so much easier all around when the decisions are made."



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