

VIM AND VIBRANCY

NEWWALL HOUSE:
LIKE TINDER FOR
WALLPAPER

From a sea of eerily-calming jellyfish to a macabrely-beautiful wall of giant honey bees awash in runny-inked Rorschach tests, the latest in wallcoverings are not wallflowers. Although, if flowers are your thing, think: a tangled garden of wildflowers and fungi, populated with striking songbirds and vaguely creepy insects, or colourful parrots perching on life-size banana fronds. "Looks this daring are best for making a statement on one small section of wall, or in the powder room," says NewWall founder and director, Maria Raco. Many of the 13 luxury brands stocked at NewWall House's just-opened Toronto showroom are hand-crafted, designed by artists, and run from \$125 to \$500 per 11-foot roll. *Signe Langford, Special to National Post*



The Scott Group, an Oakville-based company, does renovations and builds two to three houses a year. It cautions that customers should factor in 15 per cent for the unknown.

IRIS BENAROIA

Most people dream of building a souped-up house with all the frills: expansive rooms, chef's kitchens, spa bathrooms and, if you're lucky, outdoor space to play.

While custom houses are wonderful, they have setbacks, too, says Scott Shedden of The Scott Group, an Oakville-based company which builds \$500,000 to \$1.5 million homes.

It's best to have a solid plan from the beginning, Shedden says, adding that anything that changes the scope of a project leads to budget increases.

"What makes a project expensive is customization," he says, adding people should have a 15 per cent contingency fund for unknown extras that inevitably emerge.

With the excitement surrounding home design, touted in glossy magazines to HGTV to Pinterest, it's no wonder clients are forever tacking items on to their wish lists.

People want tailor-made kitchens and blingy brands — we're looking at you Bertazzoni, Viking and Miele. (And, hey, if you really want to go Rockeller, Meneghini sells a \$41,000 fridge.)

"The more detailed information you give a builder, the better for accurate budgeting," Shedden says. "It could be right down to the tile choice."

Apart from fancy kitchens, Shedden says other pricey areas include "spa-like bathrooms, built-in millwork, fireplace integration and coffered ceilings."

Then there are the over-the-top luxury requests that Shedden has discussed with industry colleagues.

"One client wanted a pristine pool area free of a shed, so he had an underground bunker built in the house for all of the pool equipment," Shedden says. "There was also the request for a wine cellar with separate areas for white and red wine and a tasting room. And in the garage, a lift that dropped underneath the floor to hold extra cars."

Shedden recently completed a 5,300-square-foot home in Oakville for a family of four that took a year to build. It beautifully illustrates the art of customization on the finished product.

Step into the light-filled residence and you're drawn in

HANDMADE HEAVEN

THE MORE DETAILED INFORMATION YOU SUPPLY
A BUILDER, THE MORE OPTIMAL IT IS FOR BUDGETING



Tailor-made kitchens are the new normal.

by the height, brightness and airiness — you could fly a kite in here. Ceilings soar to 22 feet and the walls are as white as powdered icing sugar.

Right at the centre is a showstopper: a 32-foot-tall double-sided fireplace cloaked in steel that shoots up from the basement. "It was a project within itself," Shedden says of the fireplace designed by the Mississauga-based architect on the job, David Small of David Small Designs.

"Its design was extremely complicated. In the basement we had to integrate the construction of it when we did the footings in the house," Shedden says. "Because of that, we had to consider how it intersected into the various floors and the staircase."

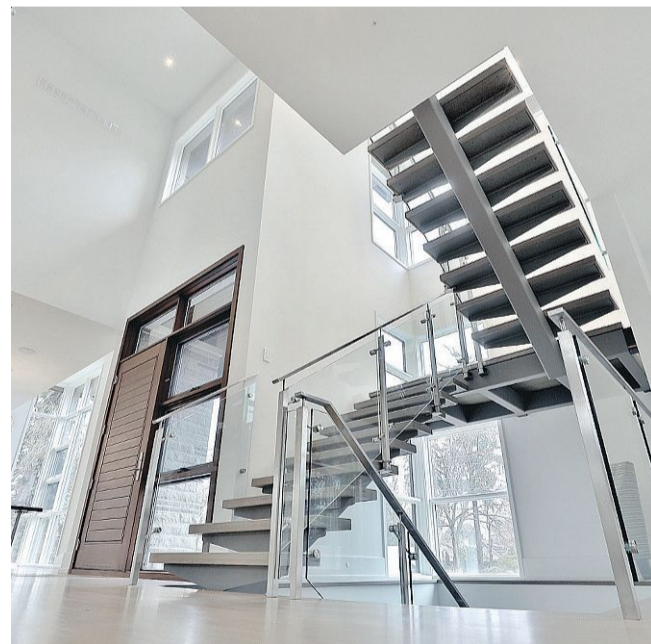
As it turns out, the stairs in this house also raised the end price. They're open-stringer style "that have to truly appear like they're floating," Shedden says.

"How you integrate that with no visible structure so that it sits off the wall and off the windows is tricky."

But what if the house itself has to appear like it's floating or jutting out of a thicket of trees? Architect D'Arcy Jones, who runs an eponymous firm in Vancouver, faced that when he designed a 2,400-square-foot cantilevered house on the southern tip of Vancouver Island for pair of transplanted Torontonians.

Three years ago, Janice Okada and her husband were living in mid-town Toronto when Okada's sister called about empty lots being sold on the island. "I flew over and we bought without looking at anything else. It was really a quick decision," says Okada who admits she was getting tired of the snow anyway.

"We just loved the land," she says. A vantage point atop a bluff overlooking the ocean also helped seal the



Staircase customization can be very exacting.

deal. So the couple moved nearby while Jones built their dream house.

"It's a very casual modern house," Okada says of the one-floor residence that sits on a big piece of rock. "The outside is clad in burnt cedar and the inside has concrete floors."

The structure was tricky. "Getting the foundation done and the slab poured took as much time as finishing the whole house because they didn't blast the rock. The concrete flows over it," Okada says.

But the long wait was worth it. Their new home is surrounded by forest and coastal trails and it's not uncommon to see eagles and whales.

"This seriously is a dream come true for us. We're having so much fun out here," she says, pointing out there's nothing like looking out of your window and seeing the Strait of Juan de Fuca with Washington's spectacular

Olympic Mountains to the south, the entrance to Sooke Harbour to the north and the coastline running west toward Port Renfrew.

Meredith and Andrew Jones are about to embark on a custom-home adventure. While their 2,800-square-foot new build doesn't have ocean views, when complete it will be chock full of covetable customs: a kitchen with swanky appliances, a home-automation system, to a tricked-out nanny suite.

The married bankers hired Mississauga-based Georgian Renovations for the house in North York, which should take eight to 10 months to complete.

After their son was born, the couple decided to knock down their bungalow to replace it with a larger house. "The space was just getting tighter and tighter," says Andrew of the bungalow.

They were rigorous about finding just the right builder.

"My wife and I are both very detail-oriented," says Andrew, so they investigated half a dozen firms before settling on Georgian Renovations, who build about 40 homes a year.

The couple was especially pleased when during the design process their point person handed over a 200-page booklet documenting every aspect of the house-to-come, down to the toilet-paper-roll holders that would be installed.

"Every fixture in every room, every single material in the house is in the document," says Andrew, listing "the door handles, the vent placement, the lock assemblies, the direction the windows will open." He adds, "They do renderings for rooms that have custom cabinetry so you can see how each drawer and cupboard will be laid out."

It sounds like overkill, but the couple is happy not to have to play babysitter. "On previous renovations the amount of time we invested to stay on top of the contractor was exhausting," Andrew says.

That means their dream kitchen should come off without a hitch. It's something Meredith is especially excited about. "We spend a lot of time in the kitchen, so we're putting an induction cooktop in the island," she says. "That way we can talk to guests while cooking instead of having our backs to them."

Such minute details make a world of difference to day-to-day living. In the 50 years he's been in the business, Georgian Renovations' president Gene Maida says, "people increasingly want to design a home around their lifestyle."

Popular upgrades include pet showers, energy-efficient everything, newfangled sound systems, roomy pantries and kitchens with huge theatre islands and two dishwashers.

"In general, they want an uncluttered lifestyle and a wow factor," says Maida.

If you can afford it, in many ways it makes sense to start from scratch to create the custom home of your dreams.

"A newer home is a better product for the homeowner because it meets all of the current building standards," Maida points out.

And, though your taxes will shoot up, you will get a \$25,000 HST rebate on a new home, he says, which is nice.

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