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NEW IN HOMES & CONDOS

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017 SECTION H

ON ON2

> HOW WE LIVE

Scoring big

Parents reclaim hockey basement from kids and fulfil their vision of a 'chic entertaining floor'

JACKIE BURNS
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

It may be on the lower level of their home, but Vita Mendolia and her husband, Joseph, have a basement that's been renovated to the highest levels of luxury.

"It's a chic entertaining floor," Vita, 48, says of the breathtaking, 2,000 square feet of living space that features a glassed-in home gym, sophisticated lounge area, entertainment section for movie nights and a kitchen/bar fit for a Hollywood bash.

Vita, a teacher, says friends are "stunned" when they come downstairs to see the space. "They can't believe it's the basement. That's not what they were expecting."

For her part, she still has to pinch herself, too. "After all these years of having the vision in your head, to be sitting there, it still it feels like, 'This is my house?'"

The renovated retreat is certainly a night-and-day transformation from the unfinished basement that had been there since the couple built their 4,000-square-foot custom home in north Etobicoke in 2001.

For years, their 14-year-old daughter, who plays competitive hockey, and their 18-year-old son used the lower level for shooting drills — the holes in the walls proof of their dedication.

But Vita and Joseph, 56, a dentist, always knew they would eventually transform the basement when the children were older and keen to entertain friends as far away from their parents as possible.

RENO continued on H6



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

NOW: Vita and Joseph Mendolia enjoy the comfort and luxury of their new basement that they had renovated late last year.



COURTESY GEORGIAN RENOVATIONS

THEN: Bags, racks, containers and shelves of hockey equipment were once the main focus of the basement.



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

Workouts in the basement now involve weights and aerobic training, not shooting and stickhandling drills — and the holes in the wall are gone.



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>> HOMES & CONDOS

Major reno came with no surprises for homeowners

RENO from H1

"They're bigger, they're louder!" Vita says and laughs.

With their son at university and their daughter in high school, the timing was right.

The couple hired Georgian Renovations, which specializes in luxury custom home renovations, additions and interior design.

Georgian spokesperson John Verdile says the Mendolias are part of a growing trend of families opting for high-end basement renovations, no longer content with the status quo of having one big storage room.

"A lot of people want that cold area to turn into another extension of the home," he says.

"It's square footage. You've paid for it and it's just sitting downstairs. If you're going to do a basement, let's do it right."

Along with Georgian designer Ashley Reekie, Verdile worked hand-in-hand with the family during the four-month project, which was finished by 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve, just in time for holiday entertaining.

Verdile says such renovations cost \$200,000 to \$300,000, depending on which bells and whistles clients choose.

The Mendolias went high-end all the way, opting for hydronic heated flooring made with solid porcelain tiles imported from Italy that mimic the look and feel of reclaimed wood.

"That's one of the new trends were



COURTESY GEORGIAN RENOVATIONS

The balls are racked for a game of eight-ball on the blue-felt pool table in the renovated basement retreat.

seeing now," Verdile says. "Porcelain tile is not just 12-by-12 inches or 24-by-24 inches, like the old days. Now porcelain comes 5-feet-by-10 feet, just like marble, granite or quartz slabs. It's so beautiful!" he says.

In the Mendolias' basement, it took three men to lay one tile, which is 16 inches wide by almost six feet long, and a half-inch thick.

Between all the materials, the hydraulics and the boiler system, plus installation, Verdile says the flooring

became a \$40,000 feature.

Other splurges include a stunning porcelain wall behind the \$8,000 elongated fireplace and a \$6,000 pool table with brushed metal legs that easily transforms into a dining-room table with dark black wood.

Since the Mendolias love to entertain, they went all-out in the kitchen/bar area, too, opting for a butcher-block countertop with a secret compartment that lifts up and becomes a trough sink where they

can chill their bottles of wine and beer on ice.

"I love the kitchen. It's perfect for what we want to do," Vita says.

Much of the family's entertaining happens in the summer, once their busy hockey season has finished. At that time, the backyard becomes pool-party central.

Now, the fun can happen seamlessly between the backyard and the basement and it's no longer a bummer when there's rain in the forecast.

> BY THE NUMBERS

6,000 Total square feet of living space, including the basement renovation

15 Number of years the family lived with an unfinished basement

\$15,000 Approximate cost of the basement's custom-made maximum-security door

\$100,000 Typical starting point for a standard 1,000-square-foot basement renovation from Georgian Renovations

\$1.5M-\$3M Approximate construction costs (not including the land) of some 6,000-7,000-square-foot homes Georgian is now working on

16 feet Sliding door put in as part of a \$650,000 main-floor renovation for a Georgian client

22-by-10 feet Size of one of Georgian's luxury laundry room renovations

"The dream was exactly what it looks like now," Vita says.

She says everything came in on-budget, just as they had discussed and signed with Georgian.

"There weren't any surprises. We're really happy about that part."



DREAMSTIME

Undertaking a reno can be complicated and stressful, George Carras writes.

Renovation activity is intensifying



George Carras

Most people regard renovations as a nice-to-have option, inspired by what they see on the growing number of home-improvement TV shows.

But in a market that's undergoing intensification, home renovations are becoming a serious business.

Last year, more than \$72 billion was spent on renovations nationwide, about 40 per cent greater than the value of all new-home construction, according to Altus Group.

There are a number of factors driving this renovation surge. In the GTA, the bulk of the detached housing stock is owned by boomers, and most of them don't wish to leave their homes. They're choosing instead to renovate.

It's understandable when you do the math. If an empty-nester living in a detached home in Toronto were to downsize into a smaller, less-expensive condominium, the costs associated with the move could total well over \$100,000, after factoring in commissions, legal costs, land transfer taxes, and moving and other expenses.

So staying put and renovating begins to make sense to many boomers especially when the math is mixed with family considerations.

This is one of the main reasons for

the shortage of detached homes on the resale market. In February, active listings of detached homes were down by approximately 40 per cent, according to the Toronto Real Estate Board.

As children of boomers struggle with ever-increasing real estate prices, many are moving back in with their parents, making it all that much harder for that unit of housing to be recycled into the resale market.

A similar demand arises from the other end of the family's generational spectrum, with aging parents moving into the same home as their adult children. In the U.S., a record 60 million Americans are living in multi-generational households.

The need to accommodate more family members under the same roof is spurring the uptick in renovation activity across the GTA and things won't be slowing down anytime soon on this front.

But undertaking a reno can be complicated and stressful, and most people find they're ill-equipped to handle the process.

Poorly planned renos often uncover deferred maintenance problems, which can end up expanding the scope and cost of projects. So it's best to consult experts, and be sure you do your homework and choose the right design professional and contractor to carry out the job.

While renovations aren't for the faint of heart, in a market deep in the throes of intensification, more housing units may be recycled through the renovation market instead of the resale market.

George Carras is president of RealStrategies Inc. and the founder of RealNet Canada Inc. (now part of Altus Group). His column appears once a month. For more information, visit realstrategies.ca.



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