

Building to last

Ripe to be revamped

Many well-built older homes across the GTA are ready for an update

Jane Dalziel knows there's no need to move if a house has good bones.

Built in the 1940s, the charming bungalow in Leaside — where Dalziel and her partner, lawyer Peter Hutcheon, live — has held up quite well through the years. With its brick façade and leaded glass windows, the house has loads of character. This eastern Toronto neighbourhood is also among the most in demand in the city.

"It's a nice property on a nice street," says Dalziel, a communications consultant in the energy industry.

Hutcheon has lived in the home since the mid-1990s and Dalziel joined him there four years ago.

While the couple were fond of the place, they had begun to feel a bit cramped. "There was a need for additional space," says Dalziel. But rather than move or tear down the older home and build something bigger, they enlisted the services of renovator Sandra Baldwin, president and owner of A Lifetime Contractor.

Over six months last year, Baldwin's team added a second storey to the bungalow and also installed new mechanical systems, which ensured that the home would operate at the highest energy-efficiency standards. "We essentially doubled the space," says Dalziel, "and we were able keep the character of the original home intact."

Across the GTA, there is a substantial number of older homes that have stood the test of time but are now ripe for renovations. "These homes have fabulous potential to be renewed," says Baldwin, who received the 2013 Renovator of the Year award from the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). "And to take an existing structure and make it new again — that's just about the greenest thing you can do. It's the ultimate form of recycling."

When renovating an older home, top-flight contractors like Baldwin focus on making sure the functions of its various operational elements — from the building envelope to the mechanical systems — are fully integrated. The goal is to create a more comfortable and healthier living space, one that will be energy-efficient and, over time, will save money for the homeowners.

The key to the integrated design and construction process, says Baldwin, is to involve all of the trades — mechanical, plumbing, electrical and framing crews — at the early stages of the renovation, before construction starts. "The client should also be at the table to understand certain suggestions and why changes are being made to the home," she explains.

According to Baldwin, the challenge for the renovation industry is that homeowners seeking to spruce up their homes tend to favour sexy upgrades, such as granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. And given the choice, these homeowners are less interested in improving the critical operational elements of their home.

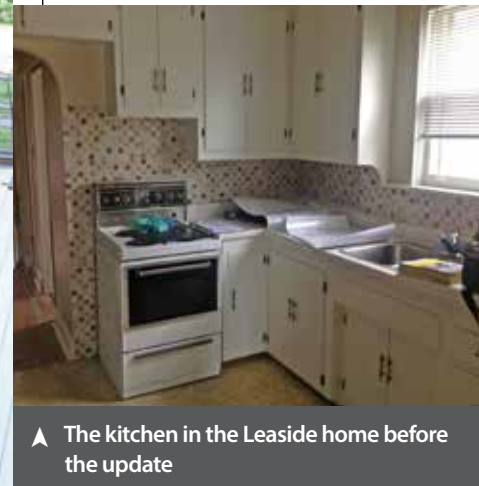
But through BILD and the RenoMark program, which connects consumers with pro-



Jane Dalziel and Peter Hutcheon hired Sandra Baldwin, right, because they knew her team would view their house as a whole and transform it accordingly.

Quality contractors: What to look for

- experience with design and construction
- a focus on an integrated design process that prioritizes energy efficiency
- expertise in managing permits and other municipal requirements
- professionalism in providing a detailed, written contract
- offers a minimum two-year warranty on all work and carries a minimum of \$2 million in liability insurance
- personal communication with you at all stages of the reno; attentiveness to your questions and concerns, offering advice whenever necessary
- adherence to the project timeline
- high standards of workmanship and attention to detail; on-site cleanliness
- visit renomark.ca to find out if they are BILD and RenoMark members



▲ The kitchen in the Leaside home before the update



Using top-class builders for home renovations can produce top-notch results. Before ▼ After ►

essional contractors, Baldwin and other quality renovators have made it their mission to educate consumers on the importance of approaching renovations in a holistic fashion. "It's a very evolutionary process," Baldwin acknowledges. "Things are coming along, but it's still early days for that kind of awareness. I think [much] of the market would still rather have granite countertops."

For her part, Dalziel in Leaside fully appreciates the benefits of the integrated renovation



process. In fact, she and Hutcheon hired Baldwin specifically because they knew her team would approach the job holistically. When the couple moved back into their house late last year, they were thrilled that they were able to transform their older home into a spacious, modernized and energy-efficient dwelling, rather than knock it down and build a completely new house.

As Dalziel puts it, "They built homes to last and ours lasted."

Holistic home renos

Keep these tips in mind if you want to renovate your house and make it function as a fully integrated system:

Start with an energy audit to determine how your home uses energy and, more important, where the energy is being wasted.

Look for a qualified contractor. Renomark.ca is a handy resource with its database of professional contractors.

Make the building envelope a top priority. Insulate exterior walls, the attic and basement. Replace older, energy-inefficient windows.

Address the mechanical systems. Upgrade the heating/air systems. Install a heat recovery ventilator (HRV). Consider putting in a tankless water heater or a high-efficiency tank.

Cut consumption by upgrading to Energy Star appliances, dual-flush toilets and low-flow faucets.

How to get your reno done right

Professional renovators want to deliver high-quality products and services on time and on budget. Sometimes, a wrench can get thrown in the plan, and communication with clients become more important than ever. Lefteris Karagiannis, chair of BILD's Renovators Council, presents the challenges to staying on time and on budget during a project.

Building permit delays

Normally, it shouldn't take long to get a building permit for a renovation — about 10 days on average, Karagiannis says, provided documentation is in order and the scope of the work falls within the existing land-use parameters for the property. Now it can take four weeks or more, depending on the project.

If a proposed renovation seeks to expand beyond the land-use parameters — increasing the square footage or height of a home substantially, for example — the application must go to the Committee of Adjustment for review, which could add up to 10 weeks to the timeline. That's even before the contractor applies for and receives a building permit.

"With so many houses under renovation across the city, there are more demands placed on municipal employees and they can't necessarily keep up," says Karagiannis. "Those delays have a trickle-down effect with serious consequences, not only for renovators but suppliers and homeowners too. It's a domino effect."

Condo renovations

Condominium renovations are becoming more popular. The unique work environment means arranging extra parking, moving materials on elevators and through corridors while not disturbing other residents in the building, and time restrictions (often, work on condos is allowed only from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.). "There's very little flexibility," Karagiannis notes. "All of these elements increase the time frame and the logistical requirements to get the job done."

Underground economy

"Consumers who hire unprofessional, underground contractors are exposing themselves to an enormous amount of risk," warns Karagiannis. These contractors are less likely to pay taxes, have a business license or carry insurance for their workers, all of which can have nightmarish consequences for homeowners if something goes wrong.

The underground economy also undermines the reputation of the renovation industry. For this reason, as well as to protect and educate consumers, BILD created the RenoMark program in 2001.

To help homeowners renovate with confidence, numerous resources and an online directory are accessible to them at renomark.ca, which offers a list of professional renovators who have agreed to follow a code of conduct and ethics.

This is the last in a four-part series sponsored by BILD. Check out thestar.com/sponsored_sections/buildingtolast.html to read the whole series.



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