

A blend of old and new

Contemporary landscaping completes a modern addition to a century-old brick home in New Edinburgh

BY HATTIE KLOTZ, OTTAWA CITIZEN AUGUST 21, 2013



The home of Jean-Louis Wallace, Brenda Baxter and their daughter, Delphine, went through several re-designs before renovations finally took place.

Photograph by: Wayne Cuddington, Ottawa Citizen

OTTAWA — It's been a long and bumpy road to the spectacular modern addition that has grown from the side of a 1905 traditional red brick semi-detached house in New Edinburgh.

Repeated objections from the New Edinburgh Heritage and Development Committee and close neighbours meant several re-designs — including reducing the proposed addition from three storeys to two — and a two-year delay, to say nothing of the added expense. A trip to the Ontario Municipal Board planning tribunal was the only solution to get the variances they needed, so the owners took along a petition and a map, indicating the opinion of over 300 neighbours, who overwhelmingly agreed.

However, it was all worth it, for what was once a typical dark and small New Edinburgh period house is now a light-filled, airy home that juxtaposes stainless steel, grey slate, maple, glass and red clay brick. Designed by James Colizza, of Colizza Bruni Architecture, the addition to the side and back of the house has increased the living space by 70 per cent.

The owners, Jean-Louis Wallace and Brenda Baxter, have also added a stunning contemporary landscaped garden. Designed by Green Roots, it boasts several levels, swaying grasses, a water feature and a seven-foot-high Gabion wall at the rear and a raised, dark grey slate platform at the front

where a life-size twig sculpture of a canoe by local artist Marc Walter sits elevated on a stand, lit from below at night. Graceful wide steps, lined by lit planters, lead to the front door from the street.

When a neighbour suggested to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board that there might be asbestos in the house, the couple was forced to replace all the walls on the ground floor (a small amount was found in the old drywall tape).

“In a way, despite the added expense, (the neighbour) did us a favour,” says Wallace, “because now it’s clean and dust-free.”

Colizza elected to move the original staircase, which led almost straight up from the old front door. He hid it around the corner in the addition, creating lots of extra space in the living room. He also designed a clean-lined built-in bookcase with lighting. The couple chose to update the look of the wood-burning fireplace and surround it with slate, giving the room a modern feel.

A large painting by Christopher Griffin — one of several by the artist in the house — greets visitors at the new glass front door. From there, a slate floor entryway leads along the side of the house to the family room, which is furnished with a contemporary sectional, gas fireplace and custom built-in unit to hide the television.

Look one way and a door leads to the decks and garden. On the far wall the maple stairs — boasting glass panels instead of a railing — leads to the upper floor. In a nod to the traditional, the couple chose to keep the original newel post, now at the top of the stairs.

“I spent a long time stripping it,” says Wallace, “and it separates the old and the new.”

Upstairs, there are three bedrooms, a corner nook that doubles as a cello practise area for the couple’s daughter and a cantilevered box room off the master bedroom with floor-to-ceiling glass that looks out over the garden.

“When we did the re-design and dropped the third floor, this was a small extra space that we carved out,” explains Baxter, indicating the almost square space that has a decidedly Zen feeling to it.

And both bathrooms offer a timeless palette of muted white and grey — a reflection of the house and a perfect juxtaposition of the old and the new.

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The addition to the side and back of the semi-detached home has increased the living space by 70 per cent. Contemporary landscaping by Green Roots boasts several levels, swaying grasses, a water feature and a seven-foot-high Gabion wall.

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