

# Now that's narrow

## Design kept simple and open in creative project that makes full use of 20-by-50-foot lot

BY SHEILA BRADY, OTTAWA CITIZEN    JUNE 18, 2011

The act of designing and building a house is much like writing and staging a play, says a man who knows the connection between wood and words.

Donnie Laflamme, actor, director, teacher, co-ordinator of Algonquin College's Theatre Arts Program and part-time renovator, is adding a new skill set to his repertoire: building an ultra-modern home on Gladstone Avenue in his childhood neighbourhood of Hintonburg.

The dramatic Laflamme is becoming a developer, set to start a corrugated metal and stained cedar home on what has to be one of the city's smallest stages: a wee lot that is only 20 feet across and 50 feet deep.

The proposed three-storey will sit on the side yard where Laflamme is finishing off renovations to his very traditional home at 1129 Gladstone Ave.

Right now his large white truck is parked in that side yard, leaving barely enough room to squeeze a second car alongside.

A high wooden fence provides privacy to the back half of the grassed lot, with a lawn mower sitting behind his home.

"There won't be much need for the mower," says Laflamme, who explains the machine actually bounces between neighbours when needed, a sharing program that helps explain why he relishes living in a community where worn homes sit next to pristine brick ones and carefully groomed gardens.

It's difficult to imagine a house on his tiny site.

"Building a house is like putting on a play. The street is a stage and the house is a performance, a story," says Laflamme, who wrote the Mechanicsville Monologues, a series of rowdy tales of life in the working-class community that has been staged between pints of beer and laughter in the Carleton Tavern. "The house is going to be a little jewel. It will be a well-fitted leather jacket. Maybe a little gritty," says Laflamme, 46.

He got the development bug after renovating his Gladstone home and a home on Sherbrooke Avenue -blame a meeting of the Hintonburg Community Association in January where he listened to architects Jim Colizza and Anthony Bruni talk about urban homes on small lots.

Colizza and Bruni (colizzabruni.com) are experts at developing small lots, recently winning provincial honours from the Ontario Association of Architects for a Hintonburg home.

"Jim Colizza took a look at my land and within two minutes said he could design a house," says Laflamme, who got the backing of the Hintonburg planning committee and then the approval of City Hall.

The modest house on a tiny lot will add a modern element to the changing neighbourhood.

The Colizza-Bruni design features a module containing the kitchen on the second floor and a bathroom on the third floor that will be cantilevered out over the side, sheltering the front door and providing a parking spot.

However, Laflamme, who plans to sell his white house next door and live in the new house while searching for other development opportunities in Hintonburg, won't be parking his truck at the new home. It's too big. He will stash it nearby.

The trick to success when building on a small lot is how to handle the car, says Colizza, noting a lot of people were not happy when a developer in Old Ottawa South wanted to add a row of townhomes, but a row of garages faced the street. Every single home in Ottawa needs parking for one car, says the architect.

Colizza compromised, providing an outdoor parking spot for a medium-sized car under the cantilevered feature. "Once you handle parking, then you move onto a relationship between house and the street," says Colizza, who integrated glass facing the street and a second-level deck.

Inside, he kept the design simple and open for the 1,100-square-foot home, which will have a bedroom on the main, street level and a second bedroom and bathroom on the third level.

"There won't be any walls on the main level. It will be very clean and simple. It will be very livable," says Colizza. The home also includes a front porch and a dining and living room on the second floor.

The house is in direct contrast to Laflamme's white frame house next door. Built in the late 1800s, it belonged to a shoemaker who worked by a big front window looking out over the busy street. Yet the energy smart design of the infill project mimics features of a nearby modern row of townhomes that are coated in silver corrugated metal.

"There is so much diversity in this neighbourhood. This house is going to fit in," says Laflamme, who grew up a few blocks away and comes from three generations of builders. "When you build a house, it will be here long after we are gone. So, you have to do it well. It should reach out to the street."

He plans to use basic materials, including finished plywood floors and maple countertops in the kitchen, and to hire friends and colleagues from Hintonburg when construction starts this month. "I want to keep the house as local as possible. I don't like big houses. Small is best. The tiny house movement is really ramping up."

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen