

House Beautiful: Arbutus reno smooths out past additions

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This Arbutus-area home was renovated from top to bottom by Shane Murray Contracting and won the people's choice award at the recent CARE awards. Bronze stucco and outside lighting give the exterior a modern style, while the new roof adds a seamless look by bringing together previous additions on either side.
Photograph By MATT LAWSON

Ontario-born Shane Murray has been a builder for 15 years. In that time, he has never torn a house down — nor does he ever plan to.

He reveres old buildings, values the workmanship and effort that went into building them and deplores the waste that occurs when perfectly decent homes are razed and piles of debris sent to the landfill.

He is a committed serial restorer.

"I always renovate, never tear down. I redo. Some people think a lot of houses should be demolished, pushed into a pile and started again, but if I can fix a place, I will. I don't enjoy building new houses."

His latest renovation project was for his own young family.

The rejuvenation and reimagining of a tired, previously added-onto home in the Arbutus area was so successful, it won the people's choice award at the recent Construction and Renovations of Excellence event, and came second in the residential renovation category for a project under \$500,000.

"I bought this house because I love the area," said Murray, who appreciates the long driveway into the half-acre property and the site's potential for a future workshop.

"It's near the University of Victoria and the ocean, and I liked the overall look of the house, although it needed a ton of work. I knew it would keep me busy for a year."

The 3,700-square-foot house has distant glimpses of Haro Strait and Mount Baker, while closer views take in a greenhouse as well as an apple, plum, cherry and pear orchard.

The refurbished residence now has three new bedrooms and two new bathrooms on the main, and a two-bedroom suite in the basement, plus two bathrooms downstairs.

"I saw it as a great opportunity to fix something up and to create a wonderful place for my family to move into. One of the first things I did was decide where the tennis court could go," he said with a grin.

Shane and his wife Penny Lloyd are both keen tennis players, as are their two sons. Their nine-year-old is on the B.C. provincial team and their other son is talented, too. (Their decision to move into the home has been put on hold, and the house is currently rented.)

Previous owners had grown old in the 1953 house and it had become dilapidated by the time he bought it two years ago, Murray said. "Some things about the house were good, others not so good and some parts were not sound."

An additional challenge was how to integrate two previous additions, one done in the late 1970s and another in the 1990s.

“The 1970s one wasn’t that special,” Murray said with a grimace of understatement. When he first saw the house, it looked like a rectangular rancher with a box added on each side.

The newer addition was a dining room with a vaulted ceiling, built to take advantage of the view. That has remained intact, but with a total upgrade.

“The other one, done in the 1970s, was like a trailer, with a convex roof that looked really hokey.”

That addition looked as if the owner had opted to cover over the deck to create extra space, leaving one of the home’s exterior walls on the inside of the extra room.

“It looked really bad and you couldn’t access this area without going into the basement and back up some stairs,” said Murray.

The addition also had sloping floors, a problem he solved by shimming them up and building a new floor on top. By raising the floor, he made room for in-floor heating and increased height in the garage below.

Now a single step leads up into what has become the master bedroom. Direct access from the upper-bedroom hall was achieved by cutting a hole in the previously exterior wall, finally linking the two parts of the house.

The home’s kitchen features cabinets by Seaside Joinery, large new windows and a door onto the broad new deck.

Murray’s mother, Lynn Murray, did the interior design work, including choosing the paint colours, lights, cabinets, flooring and more.

As with all his projects, the renovation began to take shape after Murray called designer Archie Willie of A. Willie Designs.

“Archie looked at the house and told me exactly what to do, and how to do it. He suggested all kinds of things and basically we started taking it apart and rebuilding. He always has lots of ideas on how to make the views nicer and improve other aspects.

“I have used him for every single house I have bought. He is unbelievable, so thoughtful, and he takes every detail into account. He also hand draws everything.”

One of the most striking improvements came via a redesigned roof.

Murray and Willie decided to create a new roof to encompass the entire house, making the two additions look more connected to the building.

“Willie also came up with the way we cut a hole into the side of the house and added a new stairway up to the master bedroom,” Murray said. “We always get terrific ideas from Archie.”

Murray replaced every window in the home with new, environmentally efficient ones and added 70 new pot lights to create a bright interior

Before the renovation, the house was heated by an old oil furnace and baseboard heaters. Large parts of the home were not insulated and all the windows were single-pane.

The house is now insulated up to code, said Murray, who also replaced the oil furnace with an energy-efficient hydronic heating system, which has a new high-efficiency gas boiler producing hot water on demand with recirculation pumps that heat the upper floor radiantly.

The renovation took a year, including landscaping.

“This kind of work is all about challenges,” Murray said. “But that’s the thrill. Taking something old and dilapidated and fixing it up is very different from building a brand new house. I’ve never been into that.”

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