



GO BEYOND GOOD ENOUGH TO FIND YOUR DREAM HOME



by Mark Cooper

There are a lot of people on the North Shore who live in houses that are good enough. Why change what's sort of working, if you don't really have to? Why make the effort?

For those who can, though, there's real joy living in a home that has the space you need, that really works well for your life, that feels great. As a friend often reminds me: we only go around once, so get the best ride.

That doesn't necessarily mean you have to move. You do have to be clear about the home you want to live in. Then you can determine if the house you're in can become the one you want.

Of course, if you don't like the neighbourhood, the schools are horrible and you hate your neighbours, you may want to move. But if you like where you are, you can think about changing the house you live in. Some of the main ways that older North Shore houses can be improved:

OPENED UP. Stand in your kitchen and look around. How would that space feel if it included the room next to it – the one that gets little use while everybody is crowded into the kitchen? Taking out walls is relatively easy!

UPDATED. Stay there by the sink. Now that you've mentally envisioned that missing wall, think about the dream kitchen you can now fit. Space to create. An island. Maybe a nook. The

bathroom may need a similar approach.

WARMED UP. Heated floors are a big comfort. They let you really enjoy tile! And they're fairly efficient, with low power consumption.

BRIGHTENED UP. New windows can completely change the look and feel of your home, inside and out. Windows that used to fog up, won't. The view can improve. If you are renovating, adding new lighting at the same time doesn't add a lot of cost but will really show off your great home, night and day. Also, new skylight designs have eliminated leakage concerns...

OPENED OUT. Most older homes on the North Shore are on lots that allow more floor space to be built. If you're spreading out on the main floor, that also gives you more design possibilities for your new deck.

MOVED UP! October is a good time for cleaning your eave troughs before the rains of November start to spill out of those gutters. Get right up on the roof and look around. If you're currently in a bungalow or rancher, this could be the view from your new master bedroom, or home office, or soaker tub!

Updating or enlarging a home – or both – usually increases its value, over and above the costs involved. So it often makes sense as an investment, depending on where you are, the

design you choose and on other factors.

With our North Shore tastes, building a house from the ground up now costs about \$175+ per square foot – about \$700,000 for 4,000 sq. ft. But a typical, older 2,400 sq. ft. home on the North Shore can be turned into a great 3,500 sq. ft. one for much less. If you have spare cash, renovation could be your best investment – perhaps financially, certainly for your daily life.

If you don't have that cash, you'll have to consider cash flow. Borrowing, says my friend Dean Larson, will cost about \$800 a month for \$200,000. (He says he usually recommends a home equity line of credit product to replace first and second mortgages.)

North Shore real estate is a long-term solid investment. Materials aren't getting cheaper and skilled trades labour rates aren't going down. Nobody likes to part with money. But few of life's great pleasures are free.

Find a good designer and get a contractor you trust, and this may be a great time to renovate your house into your dream home.

Note: In the last issue, Mark mentioned a website with local information about green building tech, but the site URL was dropped. It's www.sustainablebuildingcentre.com

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