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Where the builders live

Three developers open their doors to share their styles and preferences



ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE / TORONTO STAR

Half the basement floor in Geranium Corp. president Boaz Feiner's home is an arena for floor hockey, complete with advertising boards and a mural featuring hockey legends.

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It's always interesting to hear about the deciding factors that come into play when someone chooses a new home. It's especially intriguing to get the inside scoop about what influences a builder to choose a certain location or house design. Three company presidents talk about their choices.

Boaz Feiner, president, housing division, Geranium Corporation

You have to be super-organized to get four kids under age 8 out the door to school every morning — especially when 20-month-old Shaye would prefer to have her nails painted, and Calvin the dog is lying in the path most travelled.

When you've seen it all, you know exactly what you want. Just two years ago, Boaz Feiner purchased a 900-square-foot house just north of Hwy. 401, near Avenue Rd., in North York. The older structure was removed, construction began in November of 2011, and the family moved into their new home in 2012. "I designed the house in two weeks," says Feiner. "It's very systematic."

It's hard to walk through the Feiner household and not experience storage-envy. The kids enter the mudroom from a side door. Each child has a separate cubby and there are extra hooks for friends. There's a sink for washing grubby hands and a secret staircase to the extremely kid-friendly basement.

"We're an active family," says Feiner. "I think the basement is the best part."

Half the floor space is an arena for floor hockey, complete with advertising boards and a mural of a cheering crowd with the four Feiner kids front and centre. "We actually met with the muralist and tried to explain to him what we wanted to accomplish: a stadium feel, a fun environment, passionate fans and

good depth in the mural to make the space feel larger than it really is,” he says.

The basement is equipped to handle growth spurts. Plumbing, wiring and in-floor heating were roughed-in to one day transform the current playroom into a movie theatre and wet bar.

“I wanted three experiences on the main level,” says Feiner of his design with crossover archways separating work, living, dining, great room and outdoor space. “And each archway is a crossover to the next experience.”

Size counts, with a dining area that can seat 16 people and accommodations for 15 in the great room. “The space is practical and welcoming,” says Feiner.

Half saltwater pool and half Astroturf, the yard doubles as an outdoor rink in winter, complete with the home’s covered porch to tie up skates. And where, no doubt, hot chocolate is served.

Patrick O’Hanlon, president, Kylemore Communities

It’s transition time in the O’Hanlon household.

With three children over the age of 20 who make guest appearances, Patrick O’Hanlon and his wife, Sherri, have reclaimed their personal space and have renovated. After living close to 17 years in the company’s flagship community of Angus Glen in Markham, toddlers and teens no longer rule the roost.

Working alongside designer Jane Lockhart, and with kitchen planners at Downsview Kitchens, the recently redone main level of the home is the ideal of function and form.

Storage drawers stretch under the countertops of two massive islands. In the new wet bar, designated Sub-Zero drawers serve up cold and, separately, ready-made ice cubes. “We entertain a lot, and everyone ends up in the kitchen,” says Patrick. “We got rid of the traditional breakfast room and extended the countertop of the island to seat five people.”

Sherri’s office — once off the kitchen so she could keep an eye on the kids — the living room and family room have changed positions and boundaries. The original office was opened to accommodate the wet bar and a seating area. The family room focus is a new fireplace and repositioned built-ins and entertainment centre.

When Kylemore Communities introduced their custom program close to 12 years ago, the O’Hanlon’s current house was used as one of the model homes. Patrick says that high ceilings and door frames are necessary when doing renovations. “You can’t redo eight-foot ceilings.”

Upstairs, the playroom and the crash-pad room for gaming and sleepovers are being reassigned as an exercise room and laundry/projects room. Bathroom fixtures are being updated.

For the moment, the bedrooms of the O’Hanlon’s three children, Megan, Kelly and Christopher, are still intact and in the same spot that they left them.

David Hirsh, president, Brandy Lane Homes

David Hirsh believes in what he does. His company, Brandy Lane, specializes in infill residential projects on smaller pockets of busy city neighbourhoods and, in 1988, Hirsh built his own home near the well-established area of Mount Pleasant Rd. and Eglinton Ave., in Toronto.

Initially he thought he might stay for five years but, 25 years later, he's still there. "I'm an urban character, and I like the lifestyle."

Hirsh guesstimates that he's painted at least six different colours on the interiors and exterior of his home over the past 20 years. His advice to new homebuyers is, "Give yourself a neutral palette. Keep your background noise quiet with white or off-white walls."

Hirsh has become the go-to guy to try out new work products, ideas and designs. His most recent renovation was driven by a condo project where space was at a premium. "We incorporated the tub and shower in one area — a wet area."

His one regret when he built: not enough closets. "Back then, you dealt with large rooms. Now it's important to maximize storage, so that you can put yourself away and keep spaces clean."

Hirsh's next project is his kitchen. "When we (Brandy Lane) open a new condo project, I'm greeting prospects. It's easy to talk the talk, but one of the first things we look at is the design of a highly efficient kitchen — it has to be completely workable."