

DESIGN

Designer and Artist Find Ideal Live/Work Space in Riversdale

When designer Happy Grove and artist Adrian Stimson were looking for space to work from, they found that converting a former commercial building to live/work space fit the bill perfectly.

“We realized that if we added an art studio and an interior design office to our existing mortgage, we were going to pay a lot of money for two of those spaces to somebody else,” Grove explains. “We thought: we’re starting fresh businesses, we need to keep the costs under control, so how about if we try to do it all in one. Living in Caswell Hill at the time, and being involved in the community here [in Riversdale], we were completely aware of the inner city drive to create more live/work spaces.”

Stimson, then artist-in-residence at Mendel Art Gallery, had been renting the main floor of a building on 20th Street West for his art studio and an outreach program for the gallery 3 ½ years ago. Grove and Stimson decided to buy when the 1200-square-foot, two-storey building, which over the years had housed a bakery, a pawn shop and a law office, was put up for sale. They renovated and modernized the upstairs



Photos: Darrell Noakes

Live/work home offices are on the rise in Saskatoon. Happy Grove and Adrian Stimson have turned this former grocery store into a design and art studio.

apartment, joining it with their work spaces below.

“So, for less money than our mortgage on our (former) house five blocks away, we have an art studio, an interior design office and our residence,” Grove says.

Grove is quick to point out the advantages that many people find with live/work space.

“I don’t have to drive to work,” he says. “That’s a big advantage. When I left Cal-

gary, I was spending an hour and a half — at least — in the car each day getting to and from work. I think it also speaks to Adrian’s style of living, which is living artfully. He lives his work. He can be at work all the time if he wants to be. Living in the space is ideal for our relationship, because we get to see each other. We get the best of it all. We can work hard and be together.”

The move also met their needs as they strove to sim-

plify their lives, reducing the amount of clutter around them and allowing them to live in a more compact space, Grove says.

“This is a beautiful neighbourhood,” Grove adds. “This neighbourhood is filled with vibrant people. In many ways, we look at this as being the most European neighbourhood of any in the city, in the sense that people are on the street. They don’t drive to where they’re going. They walk or ride their bikes. There’s a lot of pedestrian traffic. That creates social dynamism in the neighbourhood. I know my neighbours. I talk to people I see on the street. There’s a really strong social component to it, which I think is what the city is trying to do by encouraging live/work in the inner city. I think it’s successful. It happens here naturally.”

“The way that we’ve done it in the past is to fragment communities,” Grove says. “We isolate our family units at home, when the front door garage swallows up the car and you never see the family again until they come out to go to school or work. That just isn’t the way it is down here. I have lived in all of those different kinds of settings and I love this one.”

Randy Pshebylo, executive director of Riversdale Business Improvement District, sees great potential for live/work spaces in the area. The neighbourhood shows how people see a changing rela-



A former bakery, pawn shop and a law office, the updated interior of the Grove-Stimson home is comfortable, impressive and enhances the art work.

relationship between residence and work, he says, in large part because of the influence

of developers such as Curtis Olson, who recently joined the BID board, and business

people like photographer Josie Freeborn.

“There’s a new generation of entrepreneurs. I’m dealing with a whole new generation of people showing an interest in the area,” Pshebylo says.

“When we look at Avenue C, in the 400 block, for example, across from River Landing, we’re seeing that transitional zoning, the new MX [mixed-use] zoning in that particular block, all old residences,” Pshebylo says. “Now, those are probably the hottest properties going — facing River Landing. It’s all going to be geared towards perhaps professional office space on the main floor, an accountant or something like that, and a residential component upstairs.”

Interest has been burgeoning since the Lake Placid development proposal got the go-ahead, he says. People realize that the neighbour-

hood is only a few blocks from the River Landing development, the farmers’ market, Midtown Plaza and office, services and amenities in the downtown core.

“There’s definitely a desire to look into this type of product [live/work],” says Dana Kripki, a senior planner in the City of Saskatoon’s planning and development branch. “People like the idea of living and working in the same place.”

“From a planning perspective, we encourage all types of housing development,” Kripki adds. I think there’s going to be more demand for it.”

Zoning for live/work use didn’t exist until relatively recently, notes Alan Wallace, the City’s manager of neighbourhood planning. The first mixed-use zone was a result of the Warehouse District local area plan, with changes to the zoning bylaw allowing live/work in 2003

“We’ve been trying to make changes to our zoning bylaw to be more inclusive of mixed use areas,” Wallace says. “Riversdale is definitely one of those areas that we want to see more mixed use occur in. We’re trying to encourage reinvestment in that neighbourhood.”

“What we were doing when we first thought of live/work units was trying to revitalize our warehouse district. Many cities had already converted their warehouse districts to allow for artists and others to do some creative work within the place that they live.”

DARRELL NOAKES

Home-Based Versus Live/Work Zones

Saskatoon’s zoning bylaw regulates businesses, including home-based and live/work units.

A “home-based business” is incidental to the primary use of a dwelling as a residence. A “live/work unit,” on the other hand, is a dwelling unit that is also used for work purposes.

Alan Wallace, the City’s manager of neighbourhood planning, describes the difference this way: “A home-based business is fairly tightly controlled, because it’s in a single unit dwelling. A live/work unit is not. It’s a commercial building.”

Because a home-based business is zoned for residential use, and a live/work unit for commercial or retail, the building code would apply differently, as well.

Home-based businesses exist throughout the city, but live/work units are permitted only in the commercial areas of the Warehouse District downtown, where the concept was first approved, Riversdale and South Caswell Hill. Technically speaking, live/work units are discretionary use permitted in RA1 and MX1 zoned districts. Areas zoned for B5 permit retail and residential use, but not combined.



Visit www.saskatoon-home.ca/extras.htm to see more photos.