



A Tale of Two Homes

How In-fill and Reno Created Ideal Abodes

Part One of a Three-Part Series

For two couples, each looking to find their dream home, the call of living in their favourite old neighborhoods was one that couldn't be ignored. Each couple looked for and found unique solutions to their housing quests in a way that best suited their personal tastes, budgets and personalities.

In this three-part series, we'll meet these two couples and follow them on their dream house journeys as they begin by taking their first tentative searching steps, right on up to their final reveal, in this...a tale of two homes.

by GAIL JANSEN



Photos: Courtesy Nina and Greg Moe



The Moes documented the progress of their home being completely gutted and now the renovation that is underway.



With little found in the way of suitable houses that met all of their needs, both couples decided they would need to think of alternate ways they could have the homes they desired, in the neighbourhoods they wanted.

For couples Nina and Greg Moe, and Darla Tenold and Fahmy Bekhit, the decision to upgrade from their present homes was an easy one to make, but the search for the perfect home was one that would prove relentlessly elusive. While homes they looked at in new developments lacked the space and the character both couples preferred, older homes lacked the modern layouts and custom options they were looking for.

With new developments reluctantly stricken from their potential lists despite their modern amenities, both couples decided to look at older homes in established neighborhoods, hoping they would find their perfect houses. They wanted homes that would have the character and space they desired, the modern efficiencies they hoped for, in the established neighborhoods they loved.

What they found was a hunt that was akin to searching for a needle in a haystack.

Nina and Greg Moe:

They Discover Reno is Their Way to Go

“We wanted our house to be a haven,” says Nina. “A place where we enjoy coming home to relax, so we were also a little bit concerned about the aspect of living in a construction zone for the next 10 years, something we felt you pretty much sign up for if you’re going to live in one of the newer neighborhoods, or build on a newer lot.”

For Nina and Greg, who admittedly were “all over the place” when it came to their search, they originally started out with a plan to build a brand new home in a newer development, going so far as to place a down payment on a lot. Still not fully happy with the idea, they even entertained the idea of purchasing a downtown condo, before finally settling on the solution that both ultimately felt was the right one for them, which was to buy an older home and completely gut it and renovate it to their own specifications.

Finding the Right Property

Nina and Greg searched for a home whose exterior would require little to no maintenance, one that would have instant curb appeal, and an established yard. What they weren’t looking for was a home where they would end up paying for someone else’s renovation.

“Sometimes people do things to sell a home,” says Nina. “And we thought, well, that’s nice that you did that, but we’re just going to tear it out anyways. We wanted to feel that we were getting good value for whatever home we bought in that sense.”

They got that feeling they got when they found a house that fit their criteria to a tee.

“When we walked up to this home, we had a great feeling about it immediately,” says Nina. “The curb appeal was fabulous, it had alleys on two sides, and the exterior was meticulous. The outside had just been totally redone, with new decking and landscaping that was maintenance-free,

something we were looking for because we go away to our cabin a lot in the summer.”

“We pretty much walked up to it and fell in love with it immediately,” adds Nina.

Nina and Greg were hoping the inside would be as nice as the outside. They were pleasantly surprised when their expectations were met.

“When we walked in, the interior of the house was nice, and clean, and while the layout didn’t work for us, we immediately got a great feeling from the home. We could see the space there, and knew we could do something really special.”

Finding the Right Person for the Job

Purchasing windows for their summer cabin a few years back, Nina and Greg were given a recommendation for a contractor with whom the supplier had done business with. He eventually completed the renovations on their cabin. He would also be their choice to make the renovations on the new house.

“Quite frankly when we found out that our offer on the house was accepted,” laughs Nina, “the very first phone call I made after that wasn’t to my mom or any of my friends, it was to our contractor to let him know we had found our house.”

Nina and Greg collaborated to create a design that was what they were both looking for as well as one that was physically workable in the space they had purchased.

“Greg and I had some very specific ideas of what we knew we wanted and we made a list. But the reality of it is that the contractors then have to say, ‘Is that a realistic possibility?’

After we had given them our specific ideas, they then had to come back to us and say, ‘Okay, we’ve heard you and here is what we can do to help you with that.’”



Darla Tenold and Fahmy Bekhit:

They Decide In-fill Will Fit Their Bill

“The reason we didn’t want to go to a new development,” says Darla, “is because we liked our central location, our mature neighborhood and the fact that there are trees, back alleys, and different kinds of houses. For us, we find the new developments a little too sterile.”

“Plus,” add Fahmy, speaking of the couple’s current neighbourhood, “we fell in love with this area, and didn’t really want to leave it.”

Darla and Fahmy also exhausted a myriad of potential solutions. These ranged from pricing out the cost of an addition to their existing home that would ultimately prove to be too expensive for the final product, to searching fruitlessly for a home suitable to gut.

But it wasn’t until they saw an example of what could be done using an in-fill that they decided the solution for them was to build a brand new home on an existing older lot.

“We had looked at an in-fill that was newly built and up for sale in Varsity View,” said Darla. “And while we didn’t end up making an offer on that house, it’s what gave us the idea to build an in-fill of our own.”

Darla and Fahmy could see what their new house would look like in the midst of in-fill construction.



Photo: Courtesy Darla Tenold and Fahmy Bekhit

Finding the Right Property

While Darla and Fahmy’s search for a solution to their housing dilemma was over, the search for just the right property on which to execute that solution was just beginning.

Their criteria was far different from that of Nina and Greg. The pair were more concerned with the lot size than its landscaping, and unconcerned with the home’s layout, considering their plans to either move it or demolish it. What was important to the pair was that the lot came with a reasonable price tag and that the home would not prove too costly to demolish.

“When we found this property,” says Fahmy, “it had a small house of only 500 square feet on a big developed lot, but it also had a fairly new garage that had been taken good care of.”

“It was one of the main things that helped us to make our decision,” he adds, “because now we knew we wouldn’t have to build a garage as well as a house. Considering at the time this house was the cheapest that was listed, we figured it was a really good opportunity and jumped on it.”

Finding the Right Person for the Job

For Darla and Fahmy, the process of finding the right builder was not quite so straightforward.

“When we bought the lot and the house, we had no idea about building,” says Fahmy. “We went around to some show homes in some of the newer areas, took some pamphlets, and based on those, we phoned some builders.”

They met with four builders before narrowing it down to one, choosing Sanoma Homes. They had seen the builders’ previous work, spoken to the owners of a home they had built, and felt their excitement for the project. It was also important that they would have the support they would need as they went forward with their build.

“For me, personally,” says Darla, “I wasn’t so interested in any house things and design things. I just wanted someone who would give us a lot of personal service, so that we could be involved and get the custom house that we wanted without having to do a lot of the work ourselves.”

Read the fall issue of Saskatoon Home to follow these stories, or visit www.saskatoon-home.ca for updates and photos between issues.