

POST HOMES

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Celebrity homes

Show us the money: Cuba Gooding, Jr. renovates. Page PH2

Recent transactions

If your neighbour's house sold for a million, what might yours be worth? Pages PH7 and PH8

MARCO POLO
on Architecture

Ask most Canadians what constitutes the front versus the back of a house, and you are likely to get a pretty consistent answer. The front is the public side facing the street, with the dwelling's more formal entrance, and the back is the private, more casual side, often overlooking a garden. Inside, the sequence of spaces usually consists of, from front to back, living room, dining room and kitchen.

This house type is the legacy of our colonial forebears who brought to Canada the mores of Victorian England, and the Royal Corps of Engineers' convention of regular street grids subdivided into deep, narrow lots resulting in the linear arrangement of living spaces.

Put the same question to South Africans, says architect Julian Jacobs, and they are likely to respond quite differently. The more private side of the house, away from the street, is referred to as the front, while the street face — called the rear — functions as more of a service side.

The Pamensky residence, a new house in mid-town Toronto designed by Mr. Jacobs for an expatriate South African couple, reflects this tradition.

In the case of the Pamensky residence, this is a particularly effective strategy, because the house faces a relatively busy street to the west but overlooks a verdant ravine to the east. A garage, storage spaces and a masonry wall and stair sit between the main living spaces and the street, with a skylit chasm at the stair providing light deep at the heart of the house and reinforcing the conceptual division between front and rear. The 3,500-square-foot house's organization thus provides an effective buffer against traffic noise and orients primary living spaces so they not only overlook the ravine, but also enjoy direct access to outdoors.

The ground floor accommodates all primary living spaces, including living room, dining room, kitchen, master bedroom and bath. The Pamenskys are now empty-nesters, but a large extended family of grown children and grandchildren make use of additional bedrooms and living

A SKYLIT CHASM DRAWS LIGHT DEEP INTO THE HEART OF THE HOUSE

spaces on the second floor, which also houses a study, family room and storage spaces and has access to a roof deck overlooking the ravine.

The dining and living rooms are treated as one large space spanning the width of the house, and face directly onto the ravine side of the lot.

The home's features include a sculptural fireplace whose hearth, mantel and chimney are conceived as a

South African home design helped rotate this Toronto dwelling away from the street



Looking back: This Toronto home, which overlooks a ravine, was oriented toward the backyard. Transitions between rooms and interior and exterior space are subtle.

Back is beautiful

three-dimensional pinwheel, a favourite Modernist device to create dynamic, animated space. Exposed structural timbers of parallel strand lumber provide the warmth of wood and create a coffered effect at the ceiling.

In response to the sloping site, the adjacent kitchen is elevated one step above the living/dining room, which, says Mr. Jacobs, establishes a stage-like (one could even say altar-like) relationship to the lower space, putting on display the rituals and performances of dinner preparation.

Kitchen millwork is all made of cherry wood, including the massive butcherblock countertops. Cherry is also used for other built-in items such as a dining room sideboard and a clever shelf unit used to separate the kitchen from the living/dining area. Delicately carried on slender stainless steel rods, four identical

stepped wood shelves are arranged to create spaces of varying heights and configurations.

In addition to the cherry millwork and parallel strand lumber — which is also used for the massive stair treads carried on steel stringers — lighter-coloured maple is used to create the complex pattern of "islands" on the kitchen ceiling, and darker mahogany is used for all the custom-made windows and doors.

These almost entirely encircle the living/dining space, with large pivoting doors along the south wall and at the southeast corner opening on to a terrace, creating a continuum of interior and exterior space.

The material palette is spare but rich. At the exterior, buff brick walls with concrete accents and mahogany windows and doors are supplemented with dashes of white-painted structural steel and copper flashing. Terraces and stairs are of the same brick as the walls, representing the home's engagement of, and extension into,

the landscape. Interior floors are either slate tile or carpet, with any notions of cold slate floors dispelled by the fact the house is heated by pipes cast into the radiant floor slab.

While the Pamensky residence reveals its architects' considered approach to craft and detail, it also embodies a number of subtle witticisms that animate the project. A massive Adam and Eve pier supporting the street-side canopy is composed of two interlocking hunks of concrete representing the owners: They are distinct but united cornerstones of the household.

Also at the canopy, joist ends are exposed, subtly mimicking the neo-classical dentil friezes that adorn some of the home's more traditional neighbours. While some of these gestures are so subtle as to be invisible to anyone other than the house's architects and owners, they are the kinds of details that imbue it with the uniqueness, personalized meaning and identity that befits a custom-designed residence.

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Craft, detail and subtle witticisms ensure this home is a unique reflection of owners' tastes



The kitchen, which is elevated one step above the living and dining rooms, features light-coloured maple to create complex "island" patterns on the ceiling



Pivoting doors make for a unique back entrance to the living room.



Spare but rich: Dark mahogany is used in the living room to create a look of continuity.

Hold the gingerbread

BERCZY

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The project derives its name from the Berczy family, who were awarded one of the original Crown land grants in the area about 200 years ago. The first phase, which included 155 homes, is about 85% sold out. Phase 2, launched early in the summer, is 107 units and is about 25% sold out, Mr. Ellis says.

Of those remaining there are five models to choose from in both the 32- and 35-foot lot series and eight in the 42-foot category. All are brick, two-storey structures based on traditional Unionville designs, including front porches, but without the gingerbread, he adds. The larger models have two-car garages and offer four bedrooms with an optional fifth, while the smaller ones have three bedrooms and what Mr. Ellis refers to as a garage and a half.

The smallest home still available is a three-bedroom unit on a 32-foot lot, measuring 1,594 square feet. The price is \$257,900. The largest 42-foot-lot unit measures 3,506 sq ft and has four bedrooms with an optional fifth. The selling price is \$389,900.

"One of the attractive features of Berczy Square is that the homes are well spaced and surrounded by established single-family-home communities," Mr. Ellis says. "It is also close to downtown Unionville and maybe 10-minutes drive away from everything — the 404 and 407, Markville shopping centre, even open country side and farmers' fields."

For many of the Berczy Square buyers, schools and recreation are a priority. The project meets their needs there, too, he adds. "The Unionville-Markham area can now boast some of the best schools in the greater Toronto area," he says. "As far as recreation goes, there is almost every organized and unorganized sport you can think of."

The sales office is at 4 Weatherill Road. Call (905) 887-8367. Office hours are from 1 to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends and holidays.

Terrence Belford, National Post



Berczy Square: Well-spaced homes in an established community.

Front moves back

ARCHITECTURE

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Even the shops will blend in

FERNBROOK

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The homes will be a mix of stone and brick and incorporate notable features such as wrap-around corner windows.

Prices will range from \$179,990 for a 1,012-square-foot semi-detached home to \$339,990 for a 3,710-sq-ft, five-bedroom single.

Lake of Dreams will also have its own retail area — mainly con-

venience shops and services. It will be retail with a different look, however.

"The design of the stores and shops fits in with the rest of the community," Mr. Martin says. "They won't stick out like a sore thumb."

Lake of Dreams benefits from being near the long-established Heart Lake Community, launched in the early 1970s.

"It is not like moving into a project miles away from anything. This area has been established as a desirable place to live since many of today's buyers were children. Now they want their own children to have all the benefits of suburban living."

"Everything about Heart Lake is designed to create a great

place to live. Right from the long laneway leading to the gates that mark the entrance," he says.

The on-site sales office is south of Bovaird Drive, just east of Torbram Road. Sales are by appointment only. Call 1-877-466-7766.

National Post



Fernbrook Homes of Concord.

Concrete solution to snowy sidewalks



TOM CARPENTER
Home work

If you want to maximize the lifespan of your concrete sidewalk there are two ways you can deal with the snow that falls on it. You can scrape and sweep so often that no buildup occurs, or you can shovel so rarely that snow packs down and forms a thick protective pad that lasts all winter. The potential problems arise if you opt for anything that lies between those extremes.

So-called de-icers, those variations on salt that are spread on the roads and sold by the bag, are notorious destroyers of concrete. Highway designers and engineers worry almost as much about the salt as they do about the weight of transport trucks. The de-icers eat into the concrete of bridges and abutments and eventually attack the steel reinforcing bars and mesh inside.

Your sidewalk is no less vulnerable. When you spread a de-icer, it dissolves and melts the snow by lowering the freezing point of the water. Unfortunately, that newly created water can also seep into pores in the concrete. Next time the temperature drops low enough, the water freezes and expands so small areas of the walkway are crushed from within. Layers of concrete can shear off in a process referred to as scaling, or little pop-ups can occur where the water has infiltrated.

Part of the solution to this problem is something called "air-entrained" concrete. Tiny bubbles incorporated before the concrete is poured make the resulting mix more flexible and resistant to the cracking caused by freeze-thaw cycles. Air-entrained concrete is also less permeable, which ensures less of the trouble described above. For these reasons it is now standard. Your walkway is likely made with it.

Even air-entrained concrete is still porous, however. It can suffer the same kind of damage as any other concrete, and the problem is made likelier by that other preferred weapon in the war against slippery walks, the chopper.

People take out their big, flat-blade choppers and whack away at the accumulated snow and ice. The way they go at it, you can tell they are not satisfied unless they leave a mark in the surface of the concrete. But those divots are exactly the kinds of places where the melting snow accumulates and gets under the surface. So forceful chopping is not the solution.

The answer to the problem of water infiltrating the concrete is to ensure the surface is properly sealed. There are various products available for this, and before you go to the trouble and expense, it might be worth contacting the builder of your house to determine whether this was already done. If not, you should apply a good coating next spring.

If your walk and/or driveway are properly sealed, you can carry on with a de-icer, but do so carefully.

For starters, do not try to remove all the ice and snow chemically. Instead, use the de-icer to loosen things up. Spread it around sparingly. The various materials that are used (calcium chloride, sodium chloride, potassium chloride, urea) are shaped as little spheres because ice experts have determined spheres penetrate most quickly.

When the de-icer reaches the concrete, it spreads out and works to separate the buildup from the walkway below so that all that packed down ice and snow can be scraped away. And that, by the way, is how you should look upon that tool of yours. Think of it as a scraper, not a chopper. Let the de-icer work its magic, then dig under the loosened layers.

And if you do not know whether or not your sidewalk is sealed, wait until spring. In the meantime, scrape away the snow when you can, but don't worry about buildup. If things get slippery, spread sand around; it will give you all the traction you need and you can look down at that pad of snow underfoot and know that it will protect your expensive walkway until the warm weather returns.

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