



# When the Contractor is the

With his family in mind, Northern Edge  
to buy, and then renovate,



Story: Jillian Bret, Associate Editor  
Photography: William Meijer

When I heard that David Males, the contractor who had renovated our home, had undertaken the renovation of his own family home, I couldn't wait to hear more about it. I wanted to find out what changes he'd made and how he had managed to live through the experience. Had he learned anything new from being his own client, I wondered? After all, his firm, Northern Edge Construction, is an award-winning construction company and he's been sharpening his skills for years.

David started his own process in much the same way as most homeowners – by exploring the option of moving into a new home that met all of his family's needs. He knew the neighbourhood he wanted to inhabit, and had compiled the list of attributes he was looking for in a house.

The roadblock his family faced was that the cost of buying a renovated property in their desired neighbourhood was too expensive, and often didn't completely deliver all the items on their wish list. As a result, the Males family decided to buy a house they could afford, in the neighbourhood they knew they wanted to live in, and to renovate it to specifically meet all their needs.

Having two young children and an active lifestyle, the Males' designed their renovation to suit their family and the way they live. All without

# Client

Construction owner chose in the desired neighbourhood



The kitchen has evolved into a culinary paradise

creating something so unique that it would compromise the resale value. They wanted a huge entry area that would handle the mountains of paraphernalia that circulates in and out of their house, from sports equipment and briefcases, to coats and boots.

At the same time, they needed a bathroom and change room that would be easily accessible from the backyard swimming pool. This wish list evolved into the large all-purpose mud room/bathroom/change room designed to function just as efficiently in all seasons.

The Males enjoy holding dinner parties and hosting wine tastings, so the more sophisticated needs of their entertainment lifestyle had to gel with their everyday family life. The kitchen evolved into a true cooks' paradise. Large and efficient enough for earthy projects like making home preserves, and sophisticated enough for cooking six-course meals, yet friendly and comfortable enough for everyday family living.

David Males considers the kitchen a model of efficiency, including a compost hole in the central island and a coffee bar positioned strategically to be the first thing they see when they descend the stairs in the morning.

One of the success criteria, that



Visit the countertop fabricator and choose the whole slab to ensure the entire area is free from any defects.

Males cites as most important, is planning for the unique things you want, while making sure that the space can easily be converted to more conventional uses later, especially for resale purposes. To that end, the family created a second-floor exercise room that could easily be converted into another bedroom, if required. With much the same foresight, they added an ample closet in



the main-floor den, so that it could be converted to a bedroom, if needed.

In order to simplify and economize, the family worked within the existing footprint of the original home. Although Males says that this created certain limitations on their layout options, it also helped to contain the project and provided defined parameters from which the architect worked.

For years, Males and his wife had collected photos and ideas of homes they liked, so by the time they sat down with their architect they were able to clearly convey the style they wanted to achieve. Making sure their architect captured their vision of a contemporary yet warm design was made easier because they were well prepared.

They had done their homework, they had agreed on the main things as a couple, and they knew where the line between their ideas and their dreams ended, and the practical considerations of the architect began.

I asked Males what he feels the main success criteria were that led to the satisfying results his family enjoys today. He advises having a wish book – essentially a scrapbook of photos and ideas – so that you can discuss things well in advance and avoid potential marital conflicts during the stressful phases of the renovation.

He also advises to be aware of decision fatigue, and to realize that almost everyone who undertakes a large renovation reaches a saturation point where they don't feel they can make any more decisions. Realizing that this is normal, and making as many key decisions prior to commencing the construction, helps to lighten the load.

Also recommended, it's easier to buy things all at once, so that they'll match and there won't be a problem with supply of any of the parts. For instance, plumbing accessories such as faucet sets are sold in two parts. The rough-ins are the pieces that are installed inside the wall, but they are sold separately from the external parts such as the taps and faucets. In order to make sure you have a complete, functioning package, buy all the parts together, even if the contractor only needs the rough-ins to start.

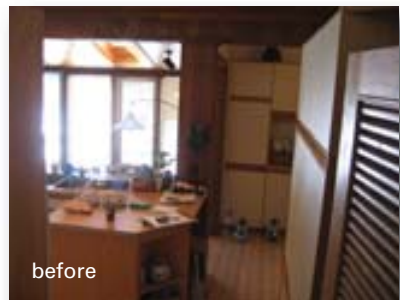


Discuss the specifics of the project well in advance to help avoid conflicts during stressful phases of the renovation.

This way you will avoid setbacks such as discontinued or out-of-stock items.

When it comes to stone countertops, Males suggests visiting the fabricator and choosing the whole slab. This ensures that you have seen all the colour and pattern and know that the slab is free from any defects. Sometimes samples in showrooms vary quite drastically from the inventory actually in stock.

In terms of overall wisdom and advice, Males emphasizes that the cheapest solution is rarely the best solution. He believes we do, in fact, get what we pay for. And, he cautions that all renovations tend to go over budget to some extent. Not because of the contractor but because homeowners tend to make decisions as they progress through the process, which change the parameters of the project. ■



Friendly and comfortable  
for everyday living

