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WESTCOAST HOMES

Talk of new countertop started it all

A major renovation brought an indoor pool and a gourmet kitchen

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It all started with a desire for a new kitchen countertop. But Anna and Richard Robinson soon found themselves okaying a major renovation to their Cape Cod-style home, that now boasts an indoor swimming pool, gourmet kitchen and family room addition.

The South Surrey couple's existing living/dining space was also reorganized, with minor structural changes to the nearly 6,000-square-foot house to improve the flow between rooms.

"We really hadn't done a lot to the place since we moved here in 1983," says Richard, a retired executive who owned an international freight forwarding and customs brokerage company.

"I just wanted a new counter-top," adds Anna, who ended up talking with an interior decorator about an entire kitchen update. But Anna added she wasn't thrilled with the decorator's suggestions, like putting an oven along the centre wall in a high traffic area.

"That night at dinner our son Anthony and Jennifer [who is now the Robinson's daughter-in-law] were taking in our comments and Jennifer suggested we talk to Frits [her boss]."

Jennifer is an architect who was working at the time for the Vancouver-based firm of Frits de Vries Architect Ltd.

The architect visited the home and immediately noticed the Robinsons' problem was one many homeowners of large dwellings experience.

"The existing house, although, a fair size, was broken up into small rooms. All of their living was taking place in a small area."



Richard Robinson and wife Anne inside their newly renovated house in Surrey.

CREDIT: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun



Richard Robinson reflects on the beauty of Crescent Beach outside the windows of the indoor pool.

CREDIT: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

In the Robinsons' case they had a little breakfast nook off the kitchen at the rear of the house, and since the nook was one of the few places to take advantage of the great view of Boundary Bay the family tended to crowd around this spot. The living room was inconveniently located at the front of the house where the only way to access it was either through a small dining room or from the front entrance way.



Richard Robinson and his wife Anne stand behind their renovated home in Surrey.

CREDIT: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

"A lot of houses have this problem. People end up using one or two areas a lot and not the rest of the house," said de Vries. "There was no easy flow."

The answer was to create a new family room addition, with a dome-shaped vaulted ceiling, that is just steps down from the now open-plan kitchen. The dining room was moved to an adjacent room that was being used as a media room.

Another puzzle the house posed was a three-car garage that encompassed nearly half of the width of the house and wasted some of the best northwest views the property enjoyed. The architect was able to access those views by utilizing a neglected garden area for the location of an indoor, approximately 53-foot pool. The pool also has a waterfall with a tiled bench under the water for the Robinsons' 10-year-old grandson Riley to enjoy.

The pool, while certainly expensive, was something Richard was enthusiastic about, considering he uses the pool himself every day. "Just when Anna was getting her new kitchen, I always had in the back of my mind the thought I'd like to have an indoor pool. And again, we were taking advantage of the view. From here you can see Grouse Mountain," said Richard.

Anna adds she likes nothing better than to jump into the hot tub in the evenings and enjoy the sunsets. "It's become more than just for swimming. It's an entertainment area," added Richard.

The clean contemporary design of the triangular shaped pool features two sets



Richard and Anne Robinson's grandson enjoys the waters of the indoor pool.

CREDIT: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

of oversized French fir doors that open on to a granite patio creating a "courtyard-like" concept.

The building contractor, Mike Merakian from Blue Ocean Construction Inc., was also able to conceal the pool's mechanical system out of sight in a large room built under grade.

"The house has more of a recreational feel," said de Vries. "The character of the house



CREDIT: Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

The renovations to the kitchen in the home of Richard and Anne Robinson bring in wide views of the garden.

comes a lot from the outdoor space the rooms are centered around."

His architectural firm, which has about a dozen projects on the go at any one time, is evenly split between renovations and new buildings.

In the case of the Robinson house, consideration was given initially to simply tearing down the old house and building new because "it's easier to start a new house because you're not restricted by what's already there," said de Vries. But after working out the two scenarios the Robinsons found it more cost-effective to renovate.

Although the Robinsons ended up with more than they initially envisioned they are pleased with the end result and speak highly of de Vries.

"The typical thing you look for in an architect is someone who is creative and has the ability to listen to you and come up with ideas of what you would like," said Richard, adding that in comparison he has also experienced having a custom-built home without using the services of an architect when he lived in Montreal.

"In that case I just went with a builder and he said here's what you get. When it came to doing anything outside his [the builder's] perimeter, he'd try to sway you back to his way."

And while de Vries says he personally has a preference for contemporary homes he understands, particularly on the West Coast, many homeowners prefer traditional.

"We don't always get the chance 95 per cent of the time," says de Vries, who noted in this case while the pool is contemporary it still works within the home's traditional style.

The Robinson house won silver for best residential renovation in this year Georgie Awards, announced last month.