

NEWSPRINT



"Miracle Transformation"

A whole lot of begging and sweat turned a tired house into a million-dollar glam queen that will hopefully raise enough money to build 10 Habitat homes for area families in need

Sheila Brady, The Ottawa Citizen
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CREDIT: Photos by Marc Fowler

If reincarnation is possible, then Jim Reid must be shaking his head and adjusting his lawyerly robes, amazed by the transformation of his big red brick home in the leafy west-end community of Qualicum.

Located north of Baseline Road, his former house at 3 Esquimaux Dr. has been transformed, not with quite the ease of Cinderella's fairy godmother, her magical wand and a lightening fast: "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo."

Instead, a year of begging, sweating and hammering by hundreds of volunteers and

contributions and labour by 174 local companies has turned Reid's 43-year-old home into a sparkling beauty, comparable to the plush showhomes highlighting the International Builders' Shows held annually in Las Vegas, Orlando and other U.S. cities.

Habitat's Gift Home, which is up for sale, is open for tours starting next Friday. Tickets are \$10, with all proceeds going to Habitat and future builds across the city.

The whole project is possible because of the generosity of Calgary lawyer Marilyn Vavasour. Vavasour became close to Reid, an Ottawa lawyer who died in Calgary, following a stroke in 2008. It was Vavasour who gifted the \$500,000 house to Habitat for Humanity last November, and earlier this week, she officially opened the house for a series of private parties then three weekends of public tours.

"It was such a happy experience for me to see the donation of the house growing into something larger than I ever imagined and that it will end up helping many more families than I had every thought possible," Vavasour said at the start of the project.

A lot has happened between gift giving and ribbon cutting. Habitat's executive officer, the resourceful Donna Hicks, came up with an ambitious plan to renovate the house, selling it for \$1.17 million and in the process raise enough money to build 10 Habitat houses for Ottawa families.

That's when the begging started. Hicks first called on Friedemann Weinhardt, an award-winning kitchen designer and owner of Design First. "When he came over, pulled out his chequebook and immediately offered \$500,000, I knew we were onto something," says Hicks, during a recent tour of the two-storey home that has gone from musty, mouldy and outdated to sweet, sparkling and very impressive.

Volunteers arrived in May to start gutting the house and then the rebuilding started.

"I've already offered \$1 million," says Weinhardt, who was co-chair of the design team with another award-winning Ottawa designer and builder Chuck Mills. Hicks laughs. There are already two seriously interested buyers, possibly more, says Hicks, adding real estate agent Myra McKeen is selling the house for Habitat, donating back her real estate fees.

Gord Weima, another award-winning builder, came on board to co-ordinate the renovation, spending countless hours begging for contributions and getting the work done. Weima compares the year-long campaign to sipping ice wine. "It's a bittersweet experience," says a reflective Weima. "Now at the end, it's sweet.

"With ice wine, you start off and hold it in your mouth and it's sweet. In the middle, there is bitterness and then it turns sweet and fruity.



"With the house, there were a couple of hurdles and there was a lot more work than expected, but at the very end, you stand back and realize this is an amazing project and amazing people who did it all," says Weima.

There is also the knowledge the sale of \$10 tickets to go through the house for the next three weekends and the sale of the house will help 10 Ottawa families have their own house, adds Weinhardt, who designed the master renovation plan with Mills and advice from Weima and designer Linda Nolan.

There was lots of potential for disaster and disconnected rooms, especially when considering several leading designers and suppliers were ready to unleash their creativity under one roof. That's when the executive committee came up with a management plan, choosing dark oak and travertine marble floors, white stone on accent walls, dark trim around the windows and a sophisticated colour palette of taupes, grey and white to play a connecting role, allowing the rooms to flow together.

Serendipity stepped in when designs from Mills in the master bedroom and Nolan in the formal dining room used blocks of MDF on the walls for panelling and added texture and Weinhardt and several of the designers played with the ceiling and multiple helpings of coving. It all looks perfectly planned.

Then there is the sense of drama Nolan delivered with colour and a refaced fireplace in the living room to Penny Southam's grand family room with the vaulted ceiling and sparkling chandelier. The Gift Home could not have happened without designers snagging donations from their suppliers, including Weinhardt who sweet-talked Artcraft, a Niagara Falls-based supplier into donating 40,000 worth of cabinets. The white and chocolate-coloured kitchen is worth a cool \$120,000.

Barwood Flooring donated all of the dark oak hardwood and xxxxxx installed \$XXXX of smart wiring controlling the heating and cooling systems, audio and multiple flat-screened televisions. Loewen installed all new windows, Merkley Supply, a long-time supporter of Habitat builds, donated white stone that rises impressively behind the open stairs, is repeated in a basement wine cellar and repeated again on the bar in the basement. Norm Lecuyer, owner of Just Basements, shouldered the responsibility of turning a smelly and nasty basement into one swanky party room.



Besides thousands of hours, Weima and architectural technologist Andre Godin took control of the main-floor office, repanning the walls, putting leather on the floors and hanging enough cabinets for the busiest professional in town.

Upstairs, Mills surveys the master bedroom he designed and the Zen-inspired ensuite with a huge walk-in shower. "I honestly wanted to do something to help

Habitat and along the way, I got to know some people very well, including Gord Weima, who I only knew to say hello to.

"Now we have a killer house on a gorgeous lot in an established neighbourhood," says Mills.

Outside, neighbours often stop to watch the work, including Mike Lemieux, a veteran real estate agent with the Sutton Group. "It's great. The sale is going to drive up the real estate values in the neighbourhood.

"It should get \$1.2, even \$1.4 million easy," he says. Back in the sunroom, near a polished grand piano, a black- and-white photograph of Jim Reid sits on a small table. His smile seems to be getting bigger as he looks around his refurbished homestead.

Sheila Brady is the Citizen's Homes Editor
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