

NEWSPRINT



Winter Whines

**The sparkplug behind Winterlude hates the cold. So Rhéal Leroux built a sumptuous summer home beside a rolling golf course**

Karen Turner - The Ottawa Citizen  
Saturday, November 03, 2007

Rhéal Leroux doesn't mince words when describing his disdain for Canada's snow and ice.

"I hate winter," says the retired events planner, who spends half the year in sunny Florida playing golf and gardening while the rest of us hardy Canadians are enduring winter's blustery wrath.

Ironically, Leroux was the sparkplug behind Ottawa's first Winterlude in February 1979. Despite his aversion to freezing temperatures, slush and snow drifts, it was Leroux sporting his trademark bow tie --he once had 48 in his colourful collection - who pitched the idea of celebrating winter



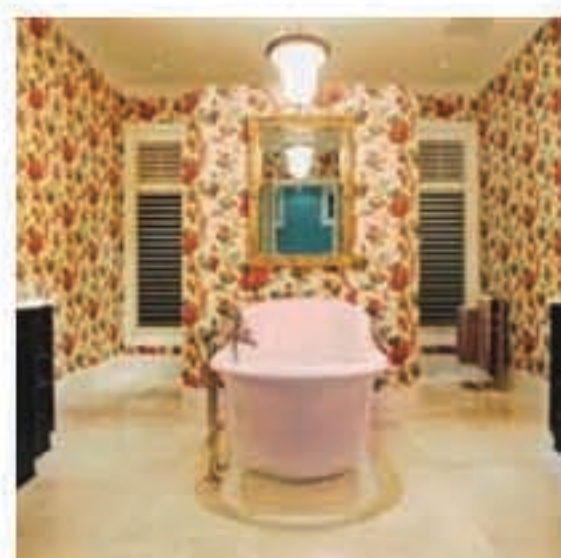
Réal Leroux, right, and his wife Rachel by staging a festival centred around the Gauthier worked closely with designer Rideau Canal.

CREDIT:  
Bruno Schlumberger,  
the Ottawa Citizen

"I'm the father of Winterlude," the 55-year-old announced during a tour last month of his custom bungalow near Manotick, just days before jetting off to West Palm Beach to ride out the winter.

Being an active golfer who plays about 100 rounds a year, it's no coincidence his Canadian summer home is in Emerald Links Estates, a prestigious community of custom homes skirting an 18-hole golf course off Mitch Owens Road.

"I love the freedom that summer offers," says Leroux, who was also the brains behind the 2001 Francophone Games and planned the Pope's 1984 visit to Ottawa.



CREDIT:  
Bruno Schlumberger,  
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Lidia Monti-Diaz, a decorator from West Palm Beach where Leroux winters, capitalized on his passion for florals by wallpapering the massive ensuite bathroom in oversized blooms.

When he's not playing golf, walking his dog Petrus, or taking barbecuing orders from his wife Rachel Gauthier, Leroux collects wine and Canadian paintings and dabbles in his flower beds, which brim with more than 4,000 blooms and shrubs, surrounding the house and swimming pool in their backyard.

Rhéal Leroux is a man who knows what he likes or, better yet, what he doesn't, especially when it comes to designing a dream home.

Topping his list of pet peeves are nests of wires dangling behind a computer or TV and rows of unsightly light switches and electrical plugs dotting hallways. And forget about cookie-cutter designs. Where's the drama and imagination if your home looks like every other house on the block?



CREDIT:  
Gordon King Photography

The backyard of the golf course home was transformed into an exclusive holiday resort with a curvy inground pool bordered by lush gardens and interlock stone.

"I wanted something completely different," says Leroux, who describes his custom three-bedroom as "no set style, but a combination of all the things I like."

Part castle, art gallery and Florida vacation home, the 3,700-square-foot bungalow is a compilation of decorative arches, circular ceiling recesses, expansive windows and one well-stocked wine room.

"He's the king of details," says Chuck Mills, who was hired to design the house, which includes a tall stone tower at the front entrance that's reminiscent of a French chateau. "I've never had a client more prepared to go through the (design and building) process, but he never pigeon-holed my creativity."

Standing inside the 23-foot high tower, you can see clearly down the long centre hall to the lush backyard. Six iron wall sconces line each side of the corridor, casting soft light on Leroux's extensive art collection.

Overhead, six decorative trusses seem to float in mid-air, following the gentle curve of the two-storey ceiling. The same graphic pattern appears in the archway that separates the formal living and dining rooms.

Ideal for entertaining, a temperature-controlled wine room is across the hall from the dining table. A rolling ladder allows the host to reach bottles stored in the 12-foot high wooden racks that wrap the room, and an electronic screen silently descends in front of the glass french doors to protect the cherished French and Italian stock from damaging sunlight.

One area where Leroux wanted the most detail was on the ceilings, which rise and fall throughout the house to heighten drama or create intimacy. Mills, owner of Chuck Mills Residential Design and Development, took great strides to ensure no two ceilings are the same.

In Leroux's office at the front of the house, an intricate grid pattern criss-crosses the ceiling. In the dark-wood kitchen, which was a finalist at this year's Housing Design Awards, a large dome is scooped out of the ceiling above the centre island. A smaller

dome painted soft green is recessed over a round bistro table in the eating area.

"I always detail the ceilings in all of my projects," says Mills, who also entered the home in the Awards of Distinction organized by the Ontario Home Builders' Association, which chose it as a finalist. "It's the single largest blank palette, so I think detailing is the way to go."

In true Florida style, a large three-season sunroom on the back of the house was integrated into the design. Three sets of folding glass doors open between the sunroom and the family room to create one large space when entertaining.

Outside, the one-acre lot has been transformed into an exclusive holiday resort with a curvy inground pool bordered by interlock stones that look like flagstone. A boulder at one end of the pool doubles as the diving board.

Raised above the back lawn, the pool and patio are surrounded by thick gardens of perennials, red begonias and bushy hostas that slope down the embankment.

"I love flowers," says Leroux, who has a clear view of the colourful spread from the four-poster bed in the couple's master bedroom.

West Palm Beach decorator Lidia Monti-Diaz capitalized on his passion for florals by wallpapering the massive ensuite bathroom in oversized blooms. In the two spare bedrooms which are linked by a guest bathroom, she imported the shades of Florida by painting the walls ocean blue and soft sunshine yellow. White plantation shutters cover the windows and closets were replaced with armoires to give the rooms the look and feel of a high-end resort.

As for those ugly computer wires, they've been cleverly banished behind a wood panel in the wall behind Leroux's desk, and the cords for the TV and DVD player are hidden inside the wall in the back hallway. To limit the number of light switches cluttering the seamless walls, there are central panels to control the 165 lights throughout the house.

It took 18 months of planning, but only five months for Mark Patterson of Patterson Homes to build the stunning bungalow.

"I wouldn't make one change at all," says the happy homeowner, who praised the many trades who worked together to build his summer retreat on time and on budget. "We wanted it to be unique and it is."

And while his wife has a few more years before she can retire from her full-time job at La Cité Collégiale, Ottawa's francophone college on the Aviation Parkway, the man who hates winter will continue to take refuge from the north's snow and ice in Florida.

"Winter does not exist for me anymore," says Leroux, a wide grin spreading across his face.

Karen Turner is a Style Weekly Homes writer.

Sources: Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development Inc., 613-825-0693 or www.cmillsdesign.com.  
Patterson Homes, 613-821-7408  
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