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SATURDAY, AUGUST 2, 2008

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'Crazy' WORKS

KATHY McCORMICK
CALGARY HERALD

It has what they call a "Starbucks" ceiling downstairs.

Huge aluminum I-beams hold up the top of the peaked, 18-foot ceilings over the kitchen.

A mesh wire railing leads to the stairs to the lower level. Brick is on an inside wall. Barn-style doors lead to the cosy TV room. Furniture is from numerous retailers, including Liquidation World.

The striking entry feature is a giant concrete face meant for an outside garden. "The great thing about this house is that the owner (55-year-old Johanna Thompson, along with her husband Dave, 57) did what she wanted," says Kelvin Choy, president of Matisse Homes, who built the home on an acreage northwest of Calgary. "She didn't care what others thought."

Indeed, says Johanna, "everyone thought I was crazy when I told them what would be in the home."

But it works — and works grandly. The 2,280-square-foot bungalow (with the lower level also developed) is a warm, contemporary home filled with interest, drama and cosy intimacy. It definitely has the wow factor.

Not that it is exactly what was planned. The enthusiastic homeowner has been carrying around a well-thumbed copy of a June 1994

Life magazine for more than a dozen years, honing her dream.

In it, renowned architect Robert Stern designed a "dream" house — one that was "classic on the outside and remarkable on the inside — and affordable."

The home, the magazine claimed, "can be adapted to suit your family and can be built anywhere you want."

Little did the writer know that, indeed, it could

be — 14 years later on an acreage in Bearspaw, outside Calgary.

"I like the floor plan," says Thompson about the magazine's dream home. "It's pretty practical and it's a house that works for us."

SEE CRAZY, PAGE 13



Christina Ryan, Calgary Herald

After designing their dream home for a decade, Dave and Johanna Thompson made it a reality in Bearspaw with the help of builder Kelvin Choy.

HOME SHORTS

Rates boost inflation

Mortgage rate increases are playing a significant role in Canada's quickening pace of inflation, says a bank report.

A Royal Bank of Canada economic update says the increase in the national inflation rate to 3.1 per cent in June coincided with a nine-per-cent boost in mortgage interest costs. Meanwhile, homeowners' replacement insurance costs rose by 3.2 per cent. The biggest factor in June's inflation, the highest monthly level in more than two years, remains the rising price of energy.

—Chuck Chiang

Permit some criticism

The Canadian Home Builders' Association - Calgary is asking members to contact the organization if they have concerns with a new city land use bylaw.

Land Use Bylaw 1P2007, which came into effect June 1, includes the issuing of development permits. Local builders are having an ongoing discussion with the City of Calgary about potential amendments to the new bylaw, including the regulations involving development permits for show homes.

—Chuck Chiang

Houses sit empty

Calgarians looking to buy property south of the border should find plenty to choose from, says a U.S. Census report.

Almost 2.2 million homes were for sale in the U.S. from April to June, with the highest vacancy rates found in the southern parts of the country.

The overall vacancy rate stands at 2.8 per cent south of the border, with 9.8 per cent of the homes built after April 2000 — close to the beginning of the real estate run-up in the states — sitting empty at the end of June.

—Chuck Chiang

THIS WEEK'S MORTGAGE RATE: 6.95%



Base rate for a one-year closed mortgage, as reported by the Bank of Canada. Lending institutions may set their own rates. Arrow indicates an increase, decrease or unchanged from one week ago.

See complete rate table, page 15

SHOW HOME MAP: PAGE 16

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FROM II

CRAZY: Design 'out of the box'

The original certainly wasn't this modern, says Dave. "But the structure of the home is pretty similar, other than some additions."

The floor plan of the Life magazine model was about 1,400 square feet, and it was a two-storey house.

"I wanted a bungalow," says Johanna. "This home is one we can live in in our old age, when we are not able to go up and down stairs."

Just one bedroom is on the main floor, but it's a good-sized master suite with a roomy walk-in closet and full ensuite.

Johanna says it was important to have three large bedrooms downstairs "so the kids can come home."

The empty-nester couple has three children, two living in other cities. The third has just moved back from living in Vancouver and will soon be moving to his own condo.

While the bones of the home design came from the Life magazine, "there were 15 other references that were handed to the designer and he was told to 'work this in,'" says Dave with a laugh.

Johanna certainly did her homework and knew what she wanted.

Once the imagination played out, then it was up to the designer to make the plan work and the builder to figure out how to build it.

Not an easy task, but a delightful one, says Choy, who has been building custom homes on acreages and infill lots in the inner city since 2004.

"I love doing anything out of the ordinary," he says. "It's great to be able to do something out of the box."

In fact, he says, that's exactly how he came up with the Matisse name, to show admiration for the creativity of the famous artist.

"This is one of my favourite homes I've ever done."

Not without challenges, though.

The I-beams soaring to the top of the peaked ceiling in the kitchen are one example. Truly the focal point of the whole house, they're dramatic and eye-catching, packing a punch no matter which direction you look. But they weren't easy to put in.

"The original beams the couple saw were in a magazine and made of steel, but the weight of so many steel beams was a factor, so we sourced other materials before deciding on aluminum, which cut the weight by one-third," he says.

"Then, my granite installer actually notched the granite to fit the beams through so there wouldn't be extra weight sitting on the granite and the danger of cracking the countertop."

The aluminum was then stained a dark charcoal colour — another complicated process that took three different steps.

The same stained aluminum beams are used to frame the floor-to-ceiling fireplace surround in the great room.

The "barn" doors are 114 kilograms so they, too, needed special metal tracks to allow them to slide open and still hold that weight.

The metal mesh used in place of spindles on the staircase railing are one-inch square, and matched on the outside deck.

As for the "Starbucks" ceiling, it's downstairs, a dropped ceiling made of plywood and filled with potlights and exposed ducts.

It was built to hide the heating ducts, rather than a traditional drywall treatment with stippling on the ceiling.

"It adds a unique flair to the space," says Choy.

The exterior of the house is quite European in style, harkening back to Johanna's Dutch roots, he says.

"The front of the home is like the house where I was born in Holland," says Johanna.

"It had French caps on top, and we adapted it from there. One of our daughters lives in Mississippi and the facades there have a French influence — that's here as well."

The home is on a lot in Bears paw.



The kitchen's open design and aluminum girders make it a focal point of the house.



Kelvin Choy of Matisse Homes says he loves creating something out of the ordinary.



Photos, Christina Ryan, Calgary Herald

Stained aluminum beams frame the floor-to-ceiling fireplace in the living room.

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The dining nook off the kitchen gives a cosy feel to the home.



The house overlooks a forest in the community of Bears paw.

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