

Tarion Award finalists revealed — did your builder make the list?

The finalists for the 2011 Tarion Awards of Excellence, which recognize new home builders in Ontario based solely on their customer service delivery, are in. The winners will be announced on April 19. The shortlist: ■ High-rise builder: Daniels (Toronto); Domicile (Ottawa); Mattamy Homes (Oakville); Options for Homes (Toronto); Tridel (Toronto). ■ Large-volume builder: Brookfield Homes (Markham);

CUSTOMER-RATED

Fusion Homes (Southwestern Ontario); Mattamy Homes; Monarch (Toronto); Pidel Homes (Guelph). ■ Medium-volume: Doug Tarry (St. Thomas); Habitat for Humanity Toronto; Morra Homes (Barrie); Neilcorp Homes (Almonte); Wriighthaven Homes (Fergus). ■ Small-volume: Cara Cus-

tom Homes (Vaughan); Fernando Homes (Welland); Gordon Tobey Developments (Brighton); Ken Seigel & Sons (Pembroke); Wasko Developments (London). *National Post*



ROOM TO DYE FOR

Predictable patterned pillows? Nah! Go bold by layering hues throughout

JEFFREY FISHER

Q I recently returned home from a trip to London and Paris to my oh-so-boring neutral house. The hotels I stayed in had lots of pattern and colour and I absolutely loved everything about them. I am so sick of my beige rooms that I'm tempted to paint my entire house red. Before I do that I thought it best to ask if you had any advice on introducing colour to my rooms without my husband and kids thinking I'm having a mid-life crisis. — Lori

A Lori my dear, you are preaching to the choir! I too love pattern and colour. And last spring I spent a week in a London hotel that had colour and pattern aplenty and I returned home thinking we just don't get it here in Canada.

People will tell you to add pops of colour throughout your house with decorative pillows, a throw or feature wall. Not me. I'm telling you to finish reading your paper and immediately go to the website of interior designer and colour guru Theresa Casey (caseydesignplan.com).

Go through her photos and notice the sophisticated manner in which she handles colour and pattern. Theresa has no fear of creating dramatic and livable spaces using both. And her work doesn't look amateurish and two-dimensional like a lot of rooms with colour can. In the photo on this page, she uses multiple colours and patterns, reminding me of the drawing rooms from my visit to London. Interestingly enough, when I asked Theresa about this particular room, she told me she took inspiration from her memories of a cozy Parisian patisserie. Here's hoping this photo reminds you of your colourful travels!

Notice the built-in bookshelves. Not only do I love how the banquette tucks between the towers, but Ther-



TED YARWOOD

An upholstered deep-hued wall and punchy seats add pizzazz in this room by interior designer Theresa Casey.

esa painted them a deep marine blue while upholstering the banquette in indigo velvet. Think of the various shades of blue in the ocean, Lori, and how they all work together. You don't have to create your new room using only one shade of a particular colour so that it looks as if everything were dipped in the same vat of dye. Be sure to layer the colours.

Behind the banquette is an upholstered wall in a purple-and-blue floral while the seat covers on the dining chairs are a red-and-grey floral. When you mix red and blue, you get purple — that's why our eye is so comfortable with all the colours and patterns together in this room.

Upholstered walls may be more

than you wish to take on with your new project, but they really do add warmth to a room. Alternatively, you can achieve a similar effect with patterned wallpaper. Take note of the tight, medium-size pattern on the wall and the loose overall pattern on the chairs. It's visually more interesting than if they were both identical in scale.

This dining room appears generous in size but the look would just as easily translate in a small study or TV room. And it doesn't matter if you have gorgeous wide baseboards and crown mouldings or narrow ones. When you paint them all one colour, it makes your ceiling height appear higher because you don't have white

trim to break up the visual line. I personally think if you have rinky-dink baseboards you're best to paint them the wall colour because there's no need to draw attention to their flaw with white paint.

The added texture and pattern from the sconces, book-filled shelves and unbelievably handsome brass grills finish this room to perfection.

But don't think I expect you to instantly transform your entire house into such a decorative delight. Just know there are alternatives to buying a bright pillow or painting one wall. Mid-life crisis averted.

National Post

Send your design question to askjeffrejfischer@gmail.com

Good-looking nooks for books and such

How to make the most of storage in your home



MIKE HOLMES
Make It Right

If you've got a storage problem and nowhere to store all your electronics and toys, a built-in unit will solve the problem. Built-in entertainment units, bookshelves and window seats provide permanent, efficient storage, so rooms look neat and often larger, with clutter out

of sight. They can increase the value of your property, if planned properly.

But I often see homeowners spend a lot of money on custom units that just aren't practical for their needs. They are too big, or too small, or they've been built without careful consideration of what they need to store.

Before calling the contractor, you need to decide what you want to hide. Is it a huge collection of books or DVDs? Is it a season's worth of clothing? Figure out how much space you need for the largest items, and a contractor can help with the rest.

Think about where and when your items will be used and how often. Seasonal decorations and clothing don't have to be as accessible as frequently used books or electronic components, for example. The idea is to make your life neater and easier, rather than just tucking things away where they may be hard to get at. If, in the end, the built-in is just a fancy closet on the outside, but a disorganized mess on the inside, you aren't going to get much benefit from it.

Figure out where you think built-in

storage would work. A good contractor will also look for wasted space behind walls, in bulkheads or kneewalls that can be put to good use. Don't dismiss oddly shaped spaces. Your contractor can tell you whether it's possible to turn that small cubbyhole into useful storage for something like a home safe.

Do you have a fireplace with short stretches of wall on either side? This could be great for a combination entertainment unit and bookshelf. Your contractor can custom-fit your TV and stereo into the units.

The same idea can work for a dormer window between sloping ceilings. This could be perfect for a built-in cushioned window bench with lift-up storage. A desk can be built into a similar space with shelves on either side. That will give you an office area in a spot that was originally unused.

Will you need doors on your entertainment unit or bookshelves? Doors will cut down on dusting and can be made of either glass or the same material as the built-in. Keep in mind that glass doors on units near the

floor can be dangerous for small children. If you have a clear idea of what you need, tell your contractor and he can work with you. He will appreciate the information.

When you and your contractor have decided what built-ins to construct, where they will go and ideal dimensions, don't forget lighting. Is it needed? If so, where? Wiring is easier and cheaper to install during the building stage than to add in post-construction. This is where a contractor can be worth his weight in gold. Is it better to install electrical outlets in the shelves so lamps can be used or media devices plugged in? Your contractor will know where electrical access is easiest and can advise on this.

It may be worth it to run wires to the bookshelves if there's even a possibility that lighting may be required later. Or have the contractor and electrician put in an electrical box in the ceiling in front of the bookshelf for spotlighting. A dimmer for mood lighting will be well worth the planning, for either in-shelf spotlighting or track lighting on the ceiling.

Built-ins can be made from solid wood, veneered plywood or medium-density fibreboard (MDF). What you decide depends on your budget and the overall design. Hardwood is the most expensive and is used for cabinetry because of its beauty, strength and stability. Kiln-dried lumber is the most resistant over time to shrinking or warping. Poplar is less expensive and takes paint well.

Don't forget finishing touches, such as crown moulding across the top of a bookcase, as well as a baseboard to give the built-in an established look. This can increase a home's value, and a good contractor can integrate additions with the existing room to create a custom look associated with expensive homes.

Well-designed built-in components are practical and can add style and character. The key is good communication of your needs to your contractor so you get what you ask for — and what you really need.

■ Catch Mike in his series, *Holmes Inspection*, airing Thursdays at 8 on HGTV. For more information, visit hgtv.ca. For more on home renovations, visit makeitright.ca.

National Post

There is nothing wrong in considering the equity value of your home as part of retirement planning

in value, particularly when you factor in the condo maintenance fees and that sort of thing," says Jack Courtney, assistant vice-president tax and estate planning at Investors Group in Winnipeg.

Ms. Lovett-Reid says it is more likely that moving into more modest quarters will save on maintenance costs, property taxes and utility bills, freeing up future retirement income. Any gain from your principal residence will not be taxed.

"You can take [the capital gain] ... and maybe purchase an annuity," she says. "You're guaranteeing an income stream to ensure that the fixed costs are covered in your new home. You can still have the money in the equity market to grow, but there's no turning back once you [sell]."

Mr. Courtney says there is nothing wrong with considering the equity value in your home as part of retirement planning, as long as you are going to realize it.

"If you have a mindset, 'I am going to stay in this particular place as long as I possibly can,' then it's not really realistic to take it into consideration as part of the potential capital for funding retirement costs," Mr. Courtney says. "Whereas if you know you're going to move into an apartment for a few years and then into some form of assisted living facility where there's an all-inclusive monthly fee, one of the resources you will be relying on are the proceeds from the sale of your home."

Mr. Courtney advises clients to carefully plan the sale of their home ahead of time, rather than waiting until poor health or an inability to maintain the property forces them into selling quickly.

"Once they move," Mr. Courtney says. "A common refrain is, 'I should have done this years ago.'"

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