

Bruce House - Southam Design



Comforts of home: Ottawa designers donate time and talent to transform a tired AIDS hospice into a cosy, bright refuge

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CREDIT: Wayne Cuddington, The Ottawa Citizen

The hub of Bruce House, the kitchen, combines the old-style charm of grandma's kitchen with the sleek, modern convenience of stainless-steel appliances.

It's crunch time for nine Ottawa interior design firms as they scramble to hang drapes, arrange furniture and fluff pillows in time for next weekend's Designer Showcase at the newly renovated Bruce House.

The red brick hospice at 461 Evered Ave. has undergone an extensive makeover since March by teams of hard-working volunteers who pooled their talents, donated their time and tapped into the generosity of their suppliers and clients to help turn the rundown two-storey into a comfortable and functional home for people living with AIDS and HIV.

The former five-bedroom was gutted this spring and expanded to include two extra bedrooms on the main level, a large country kitchen with antique cream cabinets, and a living room with spicy red sofas centred on a new gas fireplace.

Next Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the public will get a rare opportunity to tour the first floor of the Westboro facility from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and see firsthand its dramatic transformation.

"All of the designers are leading with their hearts," said Craig Hinman during a sneak peek last week of the remodelled rooms, where workers were busy painting walls, sanding trim and installing kitchen

tile in a rush against the clock to complete the house for next weekend's fundraiser.

"Every bit of this is a donation. It's just incredible," said Mr. Hinman, co-ordinator of special events at Bruce House, which provides residents with 24-hour health care, counselling and emotional support. Ernst Hupel, co-owner of 2H Interior Design, was the first to jump on board when Martha Scott, the mastermind behind the showcase, approached him last fall. Five phone calls later, the development consultant for Bruce House had all the design power she needed to turn her makeover dream into a reality.

"The response for this project was fantastic," says the fundraising dynamo, who saw the designer showcase as not only a chance to boost Bruce House's comfort level with high-end custom finishes, but to raise its community profile after 12 years of operating in anonymity.

Though the federal government poured about \$450,000 into the renovation, another \$105,000 had to be raised to cover expenses. The final tally will reach nearly \$725,000, Ms. Scott says, thanks to the generous donations made by the designers and their 80-plus suppliers.

With its beadboard cabinets, honed granite counters and stainless-steel appliances and backsplash, the kitchen alone cost about \$90,000.

"The kitchen was the hardest to expedite," says Mr. Hupel, who teamed up with Astro Design Centre, Universal Appliances and master carpenter Alfred Gruber to create an old-fashioned kitchen that blends with the vintage style of the house. "It took the most budget and the most begging, pleading and stealing."

Since the kitchen is the hub of the house, 2H designed a multi-purpose space with a built-in banquette by the window for lounging over coffee and a large centre island for preparing food.

"We wanted it to feel very comfortable, to feel very family. It's the heart of the house and everything else radiates from it, so we wanted it to feel like a warm blanket on a cold night," Mr. Hupel says.

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Griffin Kennedy Interiors, which tackled the two palliative care bedrooms, led with their emotions, designing spaces that would comfort someone



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Gold and white leaves blow across a blue-grey sky on the ceiling of the fanciful dining room.



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A padded headboard and luxe linens hide the hard edges of the hospital bed in one of the new palliative care bedrooms.



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A shapely mirror offers a glimpse into the cosy red and taupe living room.

who is ill and away from home.

"I asked myself, 'What kind of environment do I want to be in when I'm cold and sick?'" explains interior decorator Colleen Strban, who chose an English-style decor for her room, adding hits of rich red and chocolate and dark wood furniture. "I like warmth when I have the flu. It's what makes me feel good."

Across the hall, her boss Susan Kennedy took a more contemporary and fresh approach, splashing soft green on the walls and dressing the bay window with breezy floor-to-ceiling curtains in a subtle floral pattern.

"It's a room that stresses tranquillity," says Ms. Kennedy. "It's quiet in colour and streamlined without being too modern."

Both rooms include comfortable reading chairs, large area rugs and wooden headboards to hide the hard edges of the hospital beds.

All of the finishes had to be durable and easy to clean, but special efforts were made to keep the rooms from looking cold and institutional.

In Michael Courdin's contemporary living room, an oversized ottoman upholstered in cork fabric doubles as a coffee table and comfy footrest in front of the fireplace. Stylish and functional, it can be easily wiped clean if drinks get spilled or dirty shoes leave marks.

Down the hall, Penny Southam of Southam Design combined accessibility with chic spa flair in the new bathroom.

The room is both practical and edgy, with durable tiles running across the floor, a sleek bank of black storage cabinets and a funky concrete vanity.

And in a house that's focused on such a serious illness, designers Richard Newbury and Gerhard Linse insisted on having some fun.

Mr. Newbury, who co-owns Creative Friction, which specializes in commercial design, recruited decorative artists Dana Wardrop and Peter Langlois to paint a whimsical mural on the dining room ceiling.

"It's a celestial, out-of-worldly thing," says Mr. Newbury of the gold and white leaves blowing across a blue-grey sky above the table. "It's a happy touch on the ceiling with a lovely refreshing quality to it."

Mr. Linse, who signed on to redesign the activity room, front foyer and walk-in pantry, added wide mouldings and ceiling details to mirror the home's original trim. In the activity room, he wrapped one corner with a built-in games table and opened up the closet to make room for a treadmill.

"We wanted to have a little fun with it," says Mr. Linse of the small, sunny room off the front porch.

"The overriding concern was to treat it like a house and not like an institution. We wanted to provide a warm, comforting environment."

Bruce House provides supportive housing and compassionate care to people living with HIV and aids in Ottawa. With a high demand for beds, a grant was received to add a large addition to the Evered residence.

In order to complete the project, seven design firms were asked to participate in the Bruce House Designer Showcase. Each of the honored Design Firms was given a room in the home to design and build.

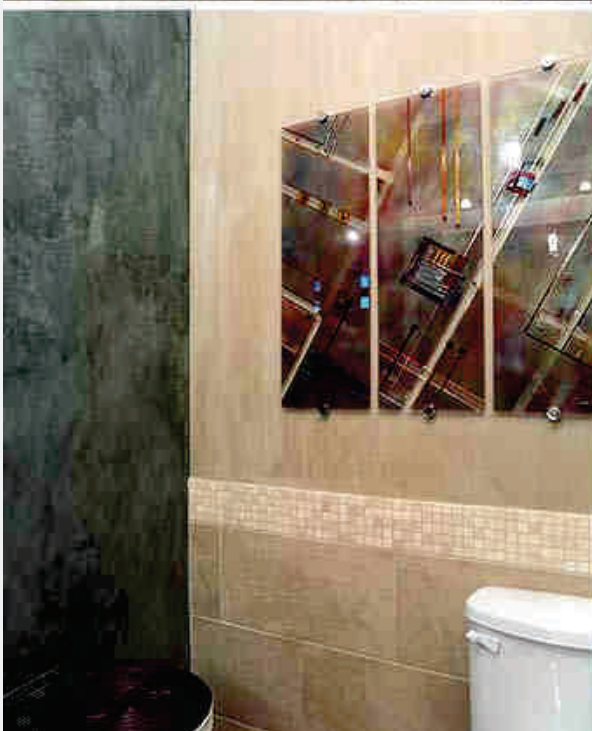
All design, fixtures, fittings, finishes and materials were donated by our firm, our suppliers and craftspeople.

The bathroom needed to be barrier free and was to be used by a number of residents. These were the only requirements given to us by our Client – Bruce House. Our goal was to create an elegant,

soothing barrier free design that the residents could enjoy for many years to come.

The vanity consists of a slab of tinted, polished concrete that is cantilevered over a mosaic base. The mosaic tile is extended wall to wall above the

vanity where a large mirror floats overtop supported by chrome standoffs. The large square vessel sink centered on the concrete counter completes the vanity design.



Adjacent to the vanity - 3 tall cabinets, used for storage, also make a very strong statement. To minimize off-gassing, we constructed the cabinets from strawboard and finished them in a very dark stain sealed with a clear lacquer. Each cabinet has 2 – 3x3 squares cut into the doors and when backlit, add a dramatic detail.

The walls are faux finished using two different techniques and two contrasting colors – again to create a subtle visual statement.

A beautiful detail that adds to the elegance of the design is the addition of 3 – 12x42 custom glass pieces of art. The glass, like the mirror, floats in front of the wall and is supported by chrome standoffs.

The playful shower curtain although only a small detail brings the color palette together and adds to the completeness of the overall design.

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