



Uniquely designed homes make use of odd-shaped lot

'Georgie' finalist nod recognizes efforts by Lucio Piccianno

PHOTOS: WARD PERRIN
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STORY: KIM PEMBERTON
WESTCOAST HOMES

In a neighbourhood dominated by "Vancouver Specials" two modern homes that sit side by side, but can be read, or seen, as one stand out as an anomaly.

They are the creation of 31-year-old Lucio Piccianno. He now is a professional architect, but was not when he designed the homes.

Wanting to create something unique for his retired parents, Piccianno found an affordable property in an well-established East Vancouver enclave and set about designing spaces that meet his parents' needs but made a novel architectural statement in a neighbourhood of 1970s modernist boxes.

While other builders might have overlooked the irregular, wedge-shaped corner lot because of its space constraints, Piccianno saw the site as a challenge.

He brought all of his architectural know-how to create not only one home for his parents but a second equally stylish detached home.

His efforts recently generated some



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peer recognition. The two residences are finalists in one of the "Georgie" categories, best single family residence under 2,000 square feet. The Canadian Home Builders' Association's B.C. branch sponsors the annual competition and will name all the winners at a dinner Feb. 10.

Knowing his parents didn't want a large home, Piccianno subdivided the lot and created two smaller lots.

"This was very tough to build on, once the [city required] set backs are factored in," says Piccianno of the lot.

"It forced a unique shaped structure. But we saw this as the perfect opportunity for my parents to stay in an urban environment close to amenities and downsize."

The logical choice to create space on the small footprint was to go vertical and in doing so Piccianno gained unexpected rooftop views.

The owners of the second home, Leif and Dorothea Sonstenes, say the views from their rooftop deck make them "feel like we are on top of the world."

Dorothea says she enjoys seeing the different play of lights in the sky from her third-floor office.

For Piccianno's parents, Filomena and Amato, the rooftop views were what sold them on their son's design. The rooftop deck also provides them with the perfect place to enjoy their pastime — gardening with symmetrical rows of lavender planted around the rooftop perimeter. The green roof for their home was donated by Sopre-

ma and IRC Bee Group Inc.

The couple have also planted gardens alongside both sides of their home with easy access from the narrow open concept kitchen/dining area. The upstairs living room is four feet above the kitchen but still feels spacious because it looks out to the kitchen below, with its 12-foot-high ceilings.

Piccianno designed both homes to be energy efficient and low maintenance. In his parents home, for instance, a stair tower at one end of the home acts as a thermal siphon. It brings warm air to the upstairs bedrooms in the winter and cool breezes in the summer from the westerly winds flowing into the house from the large kitchen windows on the opposite side of the home.

As for being low maintenance, both homes are predominantly aluminum cladding so no painting is required. The Piccianno home also utilizes German super panels on the exterior while the Sonstenes home uses handi-panels as well as aluminum cladding. Piccianno pays homage to B.C. primary west coast building material by incorporating cedar panels into the homes' exterior which further enhances the curb-side appeal.

While industrial material, like the steel and glass banister railings for instance, are used indoors the architect warms up the contemporary space by using wood throughout. All of the windows and door trims throughout both homes are pine trim but with an exterior aluminum cladding for low maintenance, and environmentally-friendly bamboo flooring is used in the Piccianno home and maple in the Sonstenes home.

The second home also has an open concept ground floor. The large windows and nine foot ceilings help to give this house as well a sense of bringing the outdoors in.

"It's amazing to live in a building that is not the norm," says Lief, pointing out the staircase in this home is in the centre. "The stair tower links the space like a Medieval turret."

The couple, who also downsized from a larger home, note the 1,700 sq. ft. home is a perfect size for them, with Leif joking the tiny spare bedroom is the right size for any one of their three children to visit briefly but "not big enough that they would ever be tempted to move back home."

Leif, who works from home as a writer, has an office with plenty of light from large windows on the second floor, while Dorothea, who runs her own home-based business recording life stories, has a third floor office with spectacular mountain views.

"We have our community space, our living space and our own individual offices. Having the offices in a different level gives a good psychological division. Working from home it is necessary to have some sort of separation [from the living areas]," says Lief.

Piccianno, who now runs his own architectural firm called DLP Designs Inc., is busy now creating two more contemporary homes nearby.

"It's very exciting to see this neighbourhood changing," says Piccianno. "There are three other modern homes within floor blocks of these homes and I'm doing two more."





The kitchen (left) does extra duty in Filomena and Amato Piccianno's home. Its extensive glazing floods the home with natural light and its proximity to the grounds provide the couple with easy, don't-have-to-think-about-it views of, and access, to their hobby.

"With small sites you have to maximize to make it feel more spacious," says son Lucio Piccianno (below left) in front of his parents' home. "The kitchen/dining area was designed as the most accessible space to the outdoors because my parents like to garden."

Son avoids lawn care

Filomena and Amato have small garden beds along both sides of the home and they have a rooftop garden. Piccianno ensured his parents home would not have any lawn because "I knew I would have to mow the lawn."

Two twice the solution

Piccianno tackled the challenges of an oddly shaped lot by dividing it and then designing two homes, below left and below right.

He used aluminum and cedar on the exteriors to introduce a "one, two, one, two sense of rhythm" he says.

DIVIDE AND DESIGN

A QUIRKY-LOT SOLUTION | F-2



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