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BOTTOMS UP!

Eurodale started their firm in the basement and went on to win BILD’s Renovator of the Year Award *By Jack Kohane*



EURODALE

Claire and P.J. Gordon were delighted with their open-concept kitchen, created by Eurodale.

It was a DIY debacle that still makes Claire Gordon cringe. A Toronto real estate agent who has seen her share of ruined renovations, she was determined that the first house for her and hubby P.J., a financial advisor, would turn into a good investment. They felt jubilant when they took possession of their three-bedroom house in Moore Park. Then, reality set in.

“The house came with a horrible kitchen,” Ms. Gordon sighs. “In our enthusiasm and inexperience, we made matters worse by starting to rip it apart on our own. It was a big mess.” Enter Eurodale Developments, who together with TV’s *Designer Guys*, came to the rescue to create a classic, open-concept kitchen.

Pleased with the results, the Gordons didn’t hesitate to call Eurodale again a couple of years later for another project: to turn their basement into a space that would accommodate an office, a lounge and playroom, a laundry room and a three-piece washroom. This entailed lowering the floor for an eight-foot ceiling. “Things ran relatively stress-free though hiccups happen,” Ms. Gordon remarks, noting that there was constant communication with Eurodale to keep the six-month project [completed last December] on track and on budget. “Building a dream home takes a dream team to pull it off.”

A happy client is music to the ears of Eurodale’s principals, Brendan Charters and Jim Cunningham, who recently won the Renovator of the Year (for 2011) award, given by the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD). “It’s like winning the Stanley Cup in our industry,” Mr. Charters laughs. “We believe our approach of helping educate and guide homeowners to make informed decisions is the right way to go. Winning the award is validation that our process and efforts are working.”

BILD president and CEO Stephen Dupuis agrees, pointing out that client testimonials weigh heavily in determining the award’s winner. He lauds

Eurodale as representing the new generation of professional renovators. “This award demonstrates their commitment to satisfying their clients and their focus on service and professionalism, combined with leadership and contribution to the industry.”

It’s been a rapid rise for Eurodale even though the firm’s owners, both 32, are one of the youngest design/build teams to snare the Renovator of the Year award. “But we haven’t been

overnight successes, either,” Mr. Cunningham says.

Both raised in Toronto, the owners first met as roommates at the University of Ottawa, forging a fast friendship. “The business part sort of fell into place on its own from there,” Mr. Charters recalls. They went on to hammer-and-nail their way on projects in Ottawa, Montreal, the Muskokas and the GTA.

“We later returned to Toronto to

be with our families, and we started Eurodale in 2003 in the basement of our house,” says Mr. Cunningham, a graduate of architecture from Algonquin College.

The partners each bring their own talents to the table. “We value what the other brings to the table,” says Mr. Charters, a carpenter who worked his way through university building homes to earn his honours science bachelor degree. “Jim has fantastic

attention to detail — thinking ahead to the next phase and the impacts the current phase will have. I’m a big-picture guy, always looking at opportunities to grow the business and the customer base.”

From the company’s first crew, which saw the partners working long hours “on the tools,” to its current five-crew teams, Eurodale’s roadmap hasn’t veered: not too big to take on small renos, and not too small to tackle the big ones. In addition to the bread-and-butter projects remodeling bathrooms, kitchens and basements, they recently completed an \$800,000 project in East York that cut a 1½ storey home in half, removing the roof top, then gutting the rest to erect a two-storey addition with a 10-foot-deep basement.

But their latest big job is the creation of the Eurodale head office at the corner of Caledonia and Lawrence near the design-decor district. A former bank building, the remodeling will be completed later this year, and will house architects, interior and landscape designers and include a green roof, a kitchen and custom millwork showrooms.

Included among Eurodale’s more notable clients are Ben Kowalewicz, lead singer of the rock band Billy Talent, and his designer-fiancée Rachele Turner, for whom an attic sanctuary was composed; and a Toronto condo remodel for Canadian poet and novelist Joy Kogawa.

“We will continue to grow,” Mr. Cunningham says, emphasizing that the Renovator of the Year award is a major rung on the ladder in the company’s climb to the top. “We think it’s a clear indication of identifying a well-rounded firm that understands their responsibilities as leaders and does so by example. It’s the same reason why you buy an award-winning book, or watch a movie that just won the Oscar — you know beforehand that you are about to make a sound investment and that you’ll enjoy it.”

National Post