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A natural dialogue

Adapting to its site,
a modern home
infused with light and
new ideas strikes a
perfect balance with
its setting

BY CHRISTOPHER CLARK



DRIVING BY, YOU COULD almost miss it entirely. Almost. Whizzing by at 60 clicks, reaching for your coffee, you might not realize anything has changed on the street, save the nifty stone walkway running parallel along your trajectory. During the day, when its lights are off and the nearby trees blanket it with shade, you could almost miss it. Almost.

Walking by, however, you don't miss it. On foot, you have more time to consider what you've stumbled upon—the latest creation of architect Brad Skinner, whose mission is to dot London's otherwise bland suburban canvas with a splash of modernity and glitz.

Two years ago, high school sweethearts Kate and Lee Greenwood returned from their honeymoon in California with



more than the customary warm glow in their hearts. They came home with a vision for their first home.

"We wanted to live in Old South or Old North, and we started looking at houses before our wedding," recalls Lee, 29. "We hadn't found anything and then we went to California and realized how much we both love modern architecture. You see people there living in these modern houses, and it's the norm. They're everywhere."

A friend suggested they check out Skinner, the city's premiere designer of modern homes. His own onyx blue cube home has been an object of fascination on Riverside Drive, near Wonderland Road, for the last few years, and he has built several thoroughly modern homes for clients in London and elsewhere.



Employing architect Brad Skinner, homeowners Kate and Lee Greenwood created a space that is modern, modest, and perfectly proportioned for its location

A wall of Algonquin limestone, a dominant feature on the home's exterior, is carried through to the dining room. The floor-to-ceiling windows stretch up two storeys



"He was excited and enthusiastic about the project right from the start," says Kate, 27. "He was very approachable, not pretentious at all."

After a few meetings, they knew they had found their designer. They also found a builder, John Wood of Brysonwood Homes. Next up: a lot. So they picked one of the many empty lots in Old South and got started. Oh, except there aren't any empty lots in Old South, or Old North, or pretty much anywhere in the kind of neighbourhood where they wanted to build and live. What to do?

The answer was close to home, or at least close to Lee's childhood home on Baseline Road, where his parents, Mary and Chris, still live. Next to the familial home was a nifty piece of property, about 40 feet wide and 165 feet deep. Subdivided, it was the perfect spot for the young couple's dream home.

Hands up everyone who wants to live directly next door to their parents. How about next door to their in-laws? Kate?

"I love Lee's parents. That was never an issue," she says with a laugh. (Skinner says the reason there are virtually no windows on the sides of the house, close to the neighbours on both sides, is city bylaws, but maybe there's another more practical reason.)

So they had their lot and their designer. The next step was to dream, and Skinner helped them do that. They had the standard binder of ideas, ripped from home design magazines and copied from HGTV fare for months, but Skinner knocked them out with his ideas almost from the start. Although they met weekly for three months early in 2008, the discussions were mostly about smaller details. They loved his overall

concept the moment they saw it.

Skinner started with the line of arching spruce trees on east side of the property. Not only did he keep them, he used them for inspiration. "I tried to relate the whole design to those trees. The trees and the houses on each side of the property, which is kind of narrow, actually."

And so the home is at once stunning and modest. It fits perfectly with the scale of the houses on either side, creating a bit of a step effect highlighted by its gently sloping roof. It is set well back from the road, in keeping with its surroundings. There is no garage jutting out like a misplaced boat house, organized down to the last hook and shelf by a hockey dad with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

In fact, there is no garage at all, a choice the couple agrees was the most difficult of the many choices they made. In the end, they looked at the house as a piece of sculpture, and any way they looked at it, a garage was going to sully the look. Of course, the parents next door have a garage, so maybe that will come in handy if and when grandkids arrive on the scene with their wagons and trikes, scooters and bikes.

Truth be told, there is room around back for a stand-alone garage if they want to add it one day. For now, however, the focus is on what's inside, where the stunning but modest theme continues.

The main floor, which measures about 1,100 square feet, is divided every so subtly into three sections. Up front, the dining room is defined by wall-to-ceiling windows on either side of a column of Algonquin limestone that reaches up to the second floor and is the dominant feature of the home from outside. The smallish gas fireplace is almost dwarfed by the limestone. The mid-section is a galley kitchen, where a 12-foot long glossy, white island serves as an anchor and focal point. Modern appliances and clean lines define the cupboards, of which there are plenty.

Beyond the kitchen is the family room, the back wall made entirely of glass.

Visible from the front foyer, a set of floating cherry wood stairs leading to the second level stands as a focal point and helps define an overall dedication to clean lines and open space. Cherry wood flooring throughout lends a warm and comfortable tone

