

GTA's top renovators recognized at Home Show

MARTIN SLOFSTRA
Editor, Homes and Decor

The GTA's top renovators and custom home builders were recognized at opening day of the Home Show yesterday at BILD's annual Renovation and Custom Home Awards.

This year, the Renovator of the Year award was presented to Golden Bee Homes.

"Golden Bee Homes' clients speak highly of the excellence of the company's work as well as their professionalism, customer service and courtesy," says Justin Sherwood, BILD's vice-president of communications. "Owner Jack Torossian gives back generously to the industry as the Chair of BILD's Renovator and Custom Builder Council and volunteers as a presenter for our renovation seminars for consumers."

The Best Washroom Renovation was awarded to All Angles Renovation Ltd. for customizing their client's space by using the space efficiently. There is plenty of natural light in the washroom with a window next to the tub and a skylight in the shower.

The Best Kitchen Renovation went to Binns Kitchen + Bath Design. The kitchen has a unique style, including a special range hood, a



Best Renovation under \$150,000 — Alair Homes - Aurora/Newmarket - Langman Place, Aurora

stove wall and upper cabinets unconnected to the ceiling.

The Best Renovation (no addition) under \$150,000 went to Alair Homes - Aurora/Newmarket for a major home transformation and upgrade on a very modest budget involving the relocation of a kitchen to achieve a very functional cooking environment.

The Best Renovation (no addition) over \$250,000 went to Bachly Construction for a stunning wine cellar, including the use of a drawbridge to provide access to portions of the wine wall.

The newly created Best Innovative Renovation award went to Kinswater

Construction for "creating a simple and timeless space" while incorporating the client's ancestral heritage into the project.

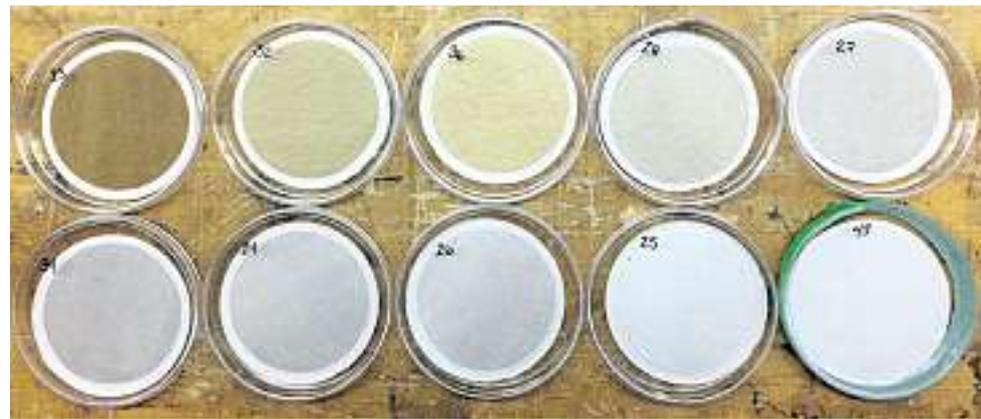
Pine Glen General Contractors Inc. won the award for Best Custom Home for its work at Shady Lane Court in Mississauga. And the Best Renovation (addition) under \$500,000 went to Urban Architects Inc.

Created by BILD in 1999, the awards program recognizes professional renovation general contractors and custom home builders for professionalism, quality of work and industry leadership.

A complete list of winners can be found in the latest blog at www.renomark.ca.



Best Custom Home — Pine Glen General Contractors Inc.



A filter tells a thousand words. Filters from different homes help show varying amounts of airborne pollution captured during the same study period.

Indoor air quality can be worse than most polluted cities



MARK WESSEL
GREEN LIVING

There are numerous studies related to outdoor air quality and the dramatic impact it can have on our health tied to airborne pollution, but until just recently, indoor air quality has been mostly ignored.

However we now know as difficult as it may be to believe, that indoor air quality in our homes can be worse than some of the world's most polluted cities.

A recently released University of Texas study called HOMEChem, found that cooking a roast dinner can raise fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in our homes to up to 200 micrograms per cubic metre for one hour.

That's worse than Kanpur, India's outdoor air quality rating of 173 PM2.5 - which according to the World Health Organization, makes it the world's most polluted city.

The short term effects of fine particulate matter can include coughing, sneezing, a runny nose and shortness of breath, while long term it can worsen such medical conditions as asthma and heart disease.

As depressing as this sounds, it gets worse. It turns out that not just that roast dinner, but any form of cooking negatively impacts on air quality.

Cooking, along with everything from dust to VOCs from paint and cleaning products, conspire to produce an airborne chemical soup in our homes.

Thankfully, University of Toronto professor Jeffrey Siegel, who helped to set up the HOMEChem test house is focussed not just on the problem of indoor air pollution, but on some of the things the average consumer can do to breathe a little easier.

"Cooking is number one on the list (contributing to indoor pollution), so probably the best thing you can do is to make sure you have a quality range fan. One with good airflow that goes out far enough to cover the stove," observes Siegel. "And if you can, put your pots on the back burner when you're cooking. And leave the fan on for a half hour after you're done cooking."

The challenge of course is that many consumers may not have a range hood or if they do, one that's good enough. And even if they do, it's unlikely they're prepared to use a fan every time they cook, let alone an extra half hour afterwards.

Siegel says one potential solution that would require government intervention (but that consumers would likely push back on) "would be to regulate the interlocking of stoves with fans so that the fans run automatically when stoves are being used."

Aside from such essential activities as cooking, Siegel says turning on the oven cleaning feature of your stove "produces amazingly high levels of particulate matter," something he personally discovered when using his own stove at home. That and anything you burn, from candles to central oil diffusers (used for aromatherapy) can cause spikes in air pollution. "If you

can, don't combust anything indoors," he recommends.

Siegel, who has a PhD in Mechanical Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, says another way to mitigate indoor air pollution is to make sure you have a good quality active carbon air filter if you have a forced air furnace.

Although more costly than regular filters which he says, "do nothing for your health," the studies conducted by Siegel and his research team show that active carbon filters can remove airborne particles and VOCs.

But it's not only the quality of filters, but how often you replace them that impacts on indoor air quality. "Most manufacturers tell you to replace your air filter every three months, based on the (furnace) fan running 20 percent of the time," says Siegel.

But at certain times of the year such as the winter or summer months when the furnace or air conditioning is running more often, the filters should be replaced within a matter of weeks versus months.

If you're left holding your breath with all of this, Siegel offers an important parting word of advice. "Don't be alarmist. Indoor air quality is really important, but no one is going to drop dead tomorrow. It's just one of those things you should address as best you can."

— Mark Wessel lives in Collingwood, Ont. and is a passionate advocate for living more sustainably at home and in the greater community. Visit his blog at www.sustainablebuildercommunity.com.