

Globe Real Estate

ARCHITECTURE



RANCHER REVIVAL

The classic postwar housing style is experiencing a renaissance, nowhere more so than in a striking modern take in West Vancouver's British Properties

Designed by Trevor Euley, the low rooflines, large windows and stucco exterior at 389 Moyno Dr. are done in a typical rancher style. Inside, the home gives way to a contemporary look straight out of *Mad Men*. EIGHTH AVENUE DEVELOPMENT GROUP LTD.

BY HADANI DITMARS

The rancher – that archetypal housing type that came of age in post-Second World War, West Coast America – has enjoyed a mini renaissance of late in one of its early epicentres – Palm Springs, Calif. But the single-storey, open-plan house with an indoor/outdoor aesthetic is on the edge of a comeback in Vancouver.

Ranchers – typically built on large lots – find their natural habitat in Vancouver's semi-rural Southlands, and in the British Properties, the posh enclave in mountainous West Vancouver.

The British Properties, originally owned by the Guinness family, has gone through a sea change since its origins in the 1950s, when covenant clauses excluding Jews, blacks and Asians were the norm, and since the local property owners' newsletter was called the Tallyho.

Residents these days are just as likely to speak farsi or Mandarin as they are to be members of Masonic lodges, and West Vancouver's first ever synagogue – the Har-El – stands proudly opposite the entrance to the British Properties.

But happily, after a bad patch of eighties and nineties monster homes, some traditions – at least architectural ones – are being revisited. For all its Anglo heritage, the British Properties – and West Vancouver in general – were once hotbeds of mid-century modernism, with residential gems by Erickson and Thom abounding. This was partly due to more relaxed planning laws and less restrictive bylaws than in the city of Vancouver (just try and build anything modern in say, tony Shaughnessy, where architects must bow deep at the heritage altar) and it's still true today.

Just off Rabbit Lane, at the edge of the Capilano Golf Club, the rancher has been stylishly revived in a gorgeous Trevor Euley-designed home by Ed Kolic of Eighth Avenue Development. When a lot went on the market two years ago in the flat, former flood plain, rancher-rich area, Kolic (who once worked with Arthur Erickson on a Fairview Slopes residential project) saw an opportunity for a contemporary take on the fifties and sixties classic.

Like that other recently revived retro-hit – the Vancouver Special (essentially a moder-



nist stucco box with a balcony), the ranch house, with its single-level open plan, is an extremely flexible and intrinsically modern space. Kolic likens it to a "penthouse on the ground" and notes that it's a favourite with empty nesters who find condos too soulless but don't want to deal with stairs and enjoy the convenience of one-storey living.

If the house at 389 Moyno Dr. is any indication, the rancher could well enjoy a contemporary comeback to rival that of the Special.

Situated next to and across the street from traditional mid-century ranchers, the Euley-designed home fits right into the neighbourhood. But the 6,500-square-foot new craftsman revival it faces – a cautionary tale about the dangers of heritage literalism – appears boxed into its lot. With the main living area under 3,500 square feet, this rancher has an attractively small footprint.

From the outside, 389 Moyno Dr. is handsome but modest and unassuming, and its long, low rooflines, large windows and stucco exteriors appear typical of the rancher style. But once inside, it's a drop-dead looker. While simplicity and openness are key, the design details and nuances employed by Euley give it depth and sophistication. The overall effect is a 2009 take on what could have been a mid-century model of Better Homes and Gardens-style gracious living. It's easy to imagine a *Mad Men* executive's wife welcoming you

with a dry martini.

The U-shaped design is a study in symmetry, with a main open-plan living area offset by east-facing bedrooms and west-facing utility rooms. A simple palette of warm limestone-colour porcelain tile – repeated on floors and ceilings – sandstone, fir window paning and walnut millwork creates a streamlined and inviting interior.

Nine-foot ceilings at the entrance way and in the two front-facing rooms give way to a dramatic 18-foot atrium at the centre of the house. Everywhere the skylights (great for passive solar heating) and extensive low-paned glazing – often only a few inches from the ground – let the outside in.

There is a sense of procession as one walks from the entrance, through the atrium to the master bedroom – by way of a kind of "light bridge" – a narrow walkway covered by a skylight and flanked by fir paned glazing on both sides that literally opens up (shoji style) to Zen landscaping and water features. The master suite itself looks out on the pool and surrounding fir trees and boasts an actual dressing room (an opportune perch for a languid smoke and one of those aforementioned martinis). The master bath is notable for its cylindrical light fixtures (by Systemalux) and its unusual fleur de lys pewter and silver-tinged porcelain wall tiles, a nostalgic seventies reference coolly contemporized (back then it would have

been velvet wallpaper.)

When you look back from the master bedroom to the front entrance there is a satisfying sense of a clear horizontal line and an intrinsic indoor/outdoor connection. Similarly the kitchen (designed especially by Young Meyerberg), with its engineered walnut millwork, neat pull-out drawers and sleek Caesar Stone countertops – is all about horizontal lines. Lit by mid-century-inspired hand-crafted Murano glass lights with transparent amber cylindrical shades, the kitchen literally opens – with the help of a five-panel folding door system – onto the pool and patio. In the generous outdoor space, a handsome brick courtyard is offset by an ever-so-West Coast overhead cedar lattice and a dramatic fire pit.

West of the kitchen, a "great room" is anchored by a sandstone hearth, and the adjacent dining area punctuated by a skylight offering illumination and views of towering fir trees. Despite the open plan, to Euley's credit, each area is delineated by thoughtful design details. Fir-trimmed valances offer a sense of depth and texture throughout. And nostalgic flourishes – like the glass side-light inserts on bedroom doors (actually glass pieces cast on sand, to pick up its irregular grain) are delightfully current.

As smooth as vermouth, this rancher pays homage to its roots, while remaining open to a stylish new future.

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INTERIORS



A fireplace done right: situated on a long run of wall, and definitely not in the corner. BARRY CALHOUN PHOTOGRAPHY

The top five worst reno mistakes you can make



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People make a lot of mistakes, avoidable mistakes, when they're building or renovating a home. Those mistakes begin at the planning phase – when the homeowners are developing the layout with a designer or architect.

I recently looked over several floor plans for next spring's reno and construction season, and I have to tell you, some things continue to pop up that make me grind my eye-teeth in frustration. Here are five things that I would ban from all blueprints.

CORNER FIREPLACES

Oh, they rake the eyes. Why would anyone put a fireplace in the corner of a room? This rookie mistake starts a domino effect of ugliness that's nearly impossible to stop. Developers are fond of doing it because it's an easy way to parachute in a prominent feature they haven't adequately planned for.

The problem is focal points. A fireplace is a natural centre of attention, and a room is most comfortable when the furniture aims at it. But when you put the fire in the corner of a room it's almost impossible to do anything but place the furnishings at odd angles to the walls, which misaligns the room with the structure of the home. (Conversely, if you ignore the fireplace as a focus, people in the room become disoriented and don't know where to put their eyes.) Fireplaces are best located on a long run of wall. There, they're easy to centre in the room, making them an effortless focal point around which to plan.

SPIRAL STAIRCASES

Cinematic grandeur is what people have in mind when they attempt to shoehorn a spiral staircase into their floor plan. But more often than not, the stairs come off like clumsy plotting – superfluous of detail and disruptive of flow.

The reason is simple: Spiral stairs are a circle, and most homes have walls that intersect at right angles – that is, they're squares. And when you drop a circle into a square, everything feels off.

One of the few places spiral stairs feels right is in a home with a grand entrance – picture the 1000 square foot foyer of a colonial mansion in the Deep South. There, fanciful spindles and expansive treads blend effortlessly with the majesty of the home. There, not here.

The problem is the same as with the corner fireplace: The alignment feels off. A home without room for its spiral staircase feels like a series of circles and squares mashed together. Odd angles proliferate, creating spaces that are difficult to furnish and a house that is challenging to resell.

Getting a spiral staircase to integrate seamlessly into a floor plan demands an investment in good architecture and exceptional craftsmanship.

Unless you're willing to go to the expense, you'd best forgo spiral stairs altogether.

My advice: Stick to straight runs – they're efficient and much easier to construct. If you want to jazz them up, spend your money on quality materials, finishes that are consistent with the rest of the home.

GRECIAN COLUMNS

Used properly, Grecian columns are a nod to outstanding architecture and engineering, and an implicit statement of affluence. And it's that savour of affluence people are after.

But in the average house – with flat, eight-foot ceilings and six-inch crown mouldings – a Grecian column looks as natural as a tuxedo in a honky-tonk. It's foolishly trying to elevate the occasion.

To support the Grecian columns, homeowners often deploy empurpled regal furnishings and many-layered draperies – touches that only which only draw attention to the original sin. They're trying to make their home something it's not.

Regardless of its size, play to your home's strength, whether it's a nice floor plan, beautiful wood floors or well-chosen finishes. Structural elements like posts should integrate with the other finishing carpentry (baseboard, window trim and crown).

SUPERFLUOUS FRENCH DOORS

Good quality French doors are beautiful – solid wood with a thick frame enclosing a grid of bevelled glass. But their appeal leads to frequent misuse.

French doors should be reserved to the entrances of formal rooms, like the living or dining room – spaces intended to impress, where the act of sweeping open two glass doors is a dramatic gesture.

There was a time when the library would have been a room that deserved French doors. But yesterday's library is today's home office, and its mishmash of Office Depot furnishings and HP hardware is no enticing thing to see through the glass.

The general rule of French doors should be: Use quality doors with beautiful hardware, and use them sparingly for rooms that you intend to decorate beautifully and share with others.

Avoid slapping French doors on rooms that require privacy – you'll only end up curtaining the glass.

PORK CHOP COUNTERTOPS IN BATHROOMS

I'm amazed that this dated detail still finds its way onto floor plans. I'm talking about that odd ledge that extends from the vanity over the toilet in the bathroom. At the best of times it housed a vase with dried twigs in it; at the worst, dingy collections of half-used perfumes and aging soaps.

If space is a concern, then glass or floating shelves over the toilet are far more useful. If covering up the unsightly toilet is the rationale, buy a nicer toilet – there are too many beautiful plumbing fixtures on the market these days to go down that road.

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DONE DEAL » KITSILANO

2265 WEST 14TH AVE.

ASKING PRICE: \$988,000

SELLING PRICE: \$1,100,000

PREVIOUS SELLING PRICE:
\$425,000 (1998);
\$325,000 (1992);
\$245,000 (1991);
\$160,000 (1988)

TAXES: \$4,651 (2009)

DAYS ON MARKET: 11

LISTING AGENT: Marty Pospischil, Dexter Realty

Buyers were attracted to this 1,600 sq. ft. detached Kitsilano home because it was listed for

under \$1 million, says agent Marty Pospischil. This demand created competing offers which pushed the sale price above the one-million marker and \$118,000 over the asking price. "Affordability and location," are what sold this home, he says.

This two-bedroom, three-bathroom home was built in 1909 and updated with a new kitchen, bathroom, veranda, upstairs balcony and a self-contained basement suite that rents for \$870 a month. The property has lane access and the house has hardwood floors, a gas fireplace and a "unique and funky three level floor plan that offers lots of light." The home is relatively small



for its 3,125 sq. ft. lot and because it is set well back on the property, it affords the new owners a long, front, south-facing yard, says Mr. Pospischil.

The house, located at Arbutus Walk, is close to numerous shops, restaurants and parks, including Connaught Park, as well as the Kitsilano Community Centre and farmers market. It is also just a few minutes from the beach, UBC and downtown.

DONE DEALS
BY THOMASINA BARNES

HISTORICAL PROPERTY SALES
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