

# ROYAL *treatment*

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Looking at Clarence and Judy Burke's dream home in Mount Royal, it's hard to believe that a year ago, a Second World War-vintage house with a crumbling foundation stood on the same spot.

But today, the elegant, 4,800-square-foot home blends in so well with the historic manors of Calgary's classic neighbourhood, you'd be hard pressed to guess the home is brand new.

"Elegance was definitely the key," says Clarence, president of Burke Builders Inc., which he established 14 years ago.

During the last couple of years, Burke Builders has branched out into constructing custom homes, and Clarence decided to build a house that not only provided him and his wife with a quality address, but could also be used to promote his work.

## Brand-new house fits in with historic Mount Royal homes

"We wanted to create something that has that timeless look," he says.

The initial plan was to renovate the original house, which the Burkes purchased six years ago, says Judy, a lawyer.

"We spent about \$75,000 to make it livable because it was in bad shape," she says, adding the couple wanted to start by constructing a new ensuite.

"One day, Clarence called and said: 'The house is coming down — we just can't salvage it,'" says Judy.

Clarence continues: "The original house was built in 1944. If it had dated back to the 1920s, its character

might have been enough that I might have kept it. But the bones just weren't there ... the structural integrity was gone and there were holes through the foundations."

Last June, Burke started rebuilding.

With the help of designer Reena Sotropa of Corea Sotropa Interior Design, the new home not only embraces the neighbourhood's classic character, it also adds many modern touches.

Clarence — who has 25 years experience in the field, including constructing condos in Antigua and renovating the historic Inn at Bay Fortune in his native Prince Edward Island — says the key to his latest project's design is automation and convenience.

SEE ROYAL, PAGE 12



Jenelle Schneider, Calgary Herald

Using imported materials from all over the world, Clarence Burke of Burke Builders Inc. has constructed a new home in Mount Royal.

# ROYAL: 'Bones just weren't there'

"We've set up an automated lighting control, which minimizes the light switches through the house," says Clarence. "You have a control touchpad that may do five functions."

These touchpads can be used to activate "theme lighting" options, he says.

"Let's say you have company over and, where people come in, you want a certain amount of lighting for the archway, or where you serve hors d'oeuvres," says Clarence.

"Then you sit down for dinner and you push one button for dinner lighting and all the lights go down to whatever level you set for dinner — soft mood lighting. Push one more button and you'll get lighting for cocktails ... whatever setting you want."

The home has three bedrooms, three fireplaces, and three-and-a-half baths, including a full bath on the main level, a five-piece ensuite and a steam shower room with dark emporador marble on the lower level.

The basement is a haven of relaxation that Clarence and Judy jokingly call the "man cave."

This lower level includes a fitness area, as well as a pool table room with a sports bar-like LCD screen that pulls out from the wall for easy viewing from the exercise bike or the pool table.

It also has a theatre room ("you've got left, right, centre, and four rear speakers ... you can't do this sort of setup unless you have a dedicated room for it," says Clarence), and a climate-controlled wine room.

"The wine room is thermostat-controlled," he says. "There are motion sensors that will turn on the lights, and we use flicker lights — three-watt lights that give you the look of an old wine room."

Rather than being a closet-like space, the wine room has windows and doors with cast-iron features to help show off the collection of vintages.

Upstairs, the three bedrooms



Photos, Jenelle Schneider, Calgary Herald

## The kitchen is centred around a large island with a sink.

have spectacular views of the neighbourhood, with the best views from the master suite.

A 10-foot ceiling inlaid with Linea track lighting, coupled with a sink station and bar fridge in the room's armoire-like wall unit, gives the spacious suite the feel of a luxury resort.

Huge windows overlook the upstairs bathtub, allowing an unobstructed view of downtown.

Nearby, the ensuite has his-

and-hers sinks with side-by-side, over-counter wall cabinets that open in opposite directions.

"We have a walk-in closet with lots of storage for Judy and a little bit for me," says Clarence.

Also upstairs is

a second washer and dryer unit (the main one is in the basement).

"My habit is to get up in the morning and throw clothes in the washer before going to work, so this washer and dryer has timers," says Judy, adding a flip-out drying rack has been installed for more delicate items.

The main level is where the Burkes plan to do most of their entertaining.

In the living room, a gas fireplace simulates the look and feel of a wood-burning fireplace, while above it, an artwork covers the wall.

Push a button and the art rolls up, revealing a plasma TV.

In the foyer, the first thing the guests will see is a spectacular Schonbek chandelier.

The kitchen has a full-sized refrigerator and freezer from Sub-Zero centred around a large island with a sink workstation and plenty of room for guests to mingle and help themselves.

Wolf and Asko appliances round out the room, while a nearby fireplace offers terrific line-of-sight elegance to visitors entering the front door.

Outside, an entertainment centre with a barbecue and hot tub overlooks a three-car detached, heated garage.

"For (the outdoor lighting), we have an astrological clock in the mechanical room," says Clarence. "It goes with the sun, so if I want the lights on at dusk and off three hours later, that will happen, no matter what time of year it is."

The appeal of the home is in the details, says Clarence.

To help give the home its character feel, the outside is covered with 10-centimetre exposure, smooth Hardie plank with 1920s-style dental and moulding detail (Hardie makes a concrete product with the look of old-style cedar).

Genuine antiques are also part of the design, such as the cast-iron side gate — which dates from 1880s France — and a 1920s-era crystal chandelier, also French.

Other details include restored 1920s nickel-plate antique heating grills, Crema-Marfil marble in the bathrooms, and one-of-a-kind white oak handrails and spindles

It's all about giving the home character.

For Clarence and Judy, this is not only a dream home, it's also a calling card that will display to clients what Burke Builders and its contractors can do.

Clarence says the work has allowed him to experiment with detail and style, while at the same time demonstrate some of the newest ideas that clients may want to consider for their own homes, such as the automation features.

"We're setting it up as a show home and an open house by invitation," says Clarence. "The idea is to showcase our work to new clients — not only what we can do, but also the trades(people) as well."

But it's also the Burkes' home, and one that Judy says has exceeded expectations.

"The house reflects who we are, and I do think it's a dream home," she says. "We like to entertain and we spend a lot of time at home ... all the things we want to do, we can do here."

"I really think we're enhancing Mount Royal. Mount Royal is about character and history and I like to think we're adding something."

Says Clarence: "Compared to what was here before, this is a huge improvement. We think it adds a lot of character to the street and it's good for the neighbourhood, it's good for the community — and it's good for us."



A restored '20s nickel-plate heating grill.