



THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

Building a custom home ensures your house reflects who you are and how you live

By Trilby Henderson | Photography By Vienna Di Ruscio

In today's housing market, says Garry Sawchyn, owner of Emerald Park Homes, "Nothing compares to custom home building when it comes to giving homeowners the creative control to construct a home that truly reflects who they are and how they choose to live."

Whether this means including an open layout built for entertaining, a quiet alcove where they can pursue a beloved hobby, or a luxurious master bedroom where they can unwind and relax, custom home building gives homeowners the freedom to choose.

For Howard and Connie Luedtke, building a custom home allowed them to perfectly combine old-world elegance and contemporary class into a unique design that fulfills all of their ideas of what a home

should be. Thanks to a solid team of professionals, including the staff at Emerald Park Homes, CNG Stone Products Ltd. and Cougar Custom Cabinets, the Luedtkes are not only living in a home they love, but were able to enjoy the process that got them there.

Howard and Connie already had some experience with the homebuilding process, having built the Regina home where they previously lived. However, Connie says the experience was much different this time around, partly because the couple had a better idea of who they were and what they wanted and partly because their builder, Emerald Park Homes, offers clients a virtually unlimited building palette. "I really felt that we were making more decisions than the first time," she says.

SEEKING THE RIGHT BUILDER

The Luedtkes spent several months working with a designer to perfect the layout of their new home before beginning their search for the right homebuilder. The quality of work they found in Emerald Park Homes made that decision easy. "We saw some of [Garry's] work and we were very happy. That's when we decided to go with him," says Connie. "He's a fantastic guy, a hands-on guy. That makes a difference." Plus, Emerald Park Homes has access to a great selection of lots in the Regina, Pilot Butte and White City areas, including acreages, bay and walkout lots, and properties near the golf course and proposed new school, making it easy for new homeowners to find the perfect location for their family.

The Luedtkes expect the community's small-town feel and friendly, safe environment will provide a relaxing oasis from the hustle and bustle of city life while allowing them to remain connected to Regina, where they own and operate two businesses: Northgate Sewing Centre and Peachtree Quilt Shop. The couple's new three-bedroom, three-bathroom home features more than 3,800 square feet of living space. Connie says she and Howard both had concrete ideas of what they wanted in their home. For example, in designing the home's interior, Connie chose to use only natural materials, such as granite, marble and hardwood. She also chose to give the home's main floor the old-world, Tuscan charm she had fallen in love with during the couple's trips to Europe, while incorporating more contemporary design features in the lower level. "Now I've got the best of both worlds," Connie says.

By enabling each other to take control over the areas that were important to them, they were able to combine their efforts into creating a home that satisfied all of their needs. For example, the home's driveway, deck, three gas fireplaces and in-floor heating were all features that were important to Howard. Connie, on the other hand,





focused much of her attention on creating her dream kitchen.

CUSTOM CABINETS, QUALITY STONE WORK

The main kitchen is clearly one of the most stunning areas of the Luedtkes' home, and fully embraces the authentic Tuscan charm Connie sought to create. A ceramic tile floor, warm colour palette, and lots of natural light combine to give the room a welcoming, comfortable feel perfect for sharing a cup of coffee with a friend or cooking up a large meal for a group gathering.

The heart of the kitchen is, of course, the cabinetry built by Cougar Custom Cabinets of Regina. The family-run business, owned by Ken and Sherry Kraushaar, has been building and installing custom-made cabinets for more than 28 years, and takes pride in offering clients the most innovative designs, materials and techniques available on the market.

For their kitchen, Connie selected solid maple cabinets, lacquered off-white and glazed with a rich, dark-brown stain in keeping with her Tuscan style. She chose a dark-brown maple island to create contrast within the kitchen and connect the space to the open living room by matching the colour of the wood flooring and fireplace mantel.

The Luedtkes say they received an outstanding level of customer service and were impressed with the fact that Ken not only made himself accessible to them, but really listened to what they wanted. "Our experience working with Ken was wonderful," says Connie. "I would have to say that he's a very talented, gifted cabinet maker. He not only does the job, but he's a good creator."

The company provided the Luedtkes with a 3D design of each of the cabinets they had planned for the house, enabling them to easily visualize how the cabinets would fit into each space and function with their needs. "That was very helpful," says Connie. "That was very big."

Since every aspect of each cabinet is constructed at the company's workshop, Cougar Custom Cabinets maintains complete control over the quality of their workmanship and the final products they produce. They are also able to fulfill unique requests that mass cabinet manufacturers cannot meet. In fact, Ken has a reputation for tackling new challenges and thinking outside of the box to achieve the look and functionality his customers desire.

In the Luedtke kitchen, Ken faced the challenge of constructing cabinets that could accommodate the numerous high-end, cutting edge appliances the couple



had chosen, including an extra-wide cook top and built-in microwave drawer. He also included an appliance lift for Connie's large mixer: instead of her having to haul the heavy mixer in and out of a cupboard, the pull-out shelf on which the appliance sits can be raised to counter height and then lowered back into place when it's not needed.

Cougar Custom Cabinets also constructed the cabinetry in the home's bathrooms, laundry and lower-level mini-kitchen. In keeping with the more contemporary appeal of the lower level, the maple cabinetry throughout the basement was finished with a deep-brown, hand-rubbed stain.

When Connie expressed her desire to give the bar-height counter in the mini kitchen a bit of extra flair, Ken added a stainless-steel panel along the bottom. He also suggested additional cabinets for the laundry room in order to maximize the storage potential of the space—a suggestion Connie is very happy she listened to.

Of course, no cabinet is complete without its crowning touch—the countertop—and nothing combines beauty and durability like natural stone. The Luedtkes considered a couple of different companies, but Connie says she was immediately impressed with CNG Stone Products Ltd. the first time she walked through the business's front door and was greeted by owner Scott Tresek. "It was Scott's helpfulness that drew me in," says Connie. "We received good customer service."

Their first impression proved true, as the Luedtkes found that CNG Stone continued to deliver a level of customer service beyond their expectations. In fact, providing outstanding customer service is one of the cornerstones on which the Regina-based company has built its business. The other is the quality workmanship and expertise it brings to each custom granite and concrete project it completes.

In the Luedtke home, CNG's craftsmanship is most apparent in the kitchen, where it was able to fulfill Connie's unique-but-challenging request for a large granite island countertop featuring an Ogee edge with a full bullnose edge laminated onto it. "When I wanted something, they really bent over backwards to find it," says Connie.

It was CNG who recognized the need to double the thickness of the rest of the kitchen countertops to match that of the island. "We knew the island would look nice and thick because of the laminated edge, and we had concerns that the rest of the kitchen, if not laminated, wouldn't look right, so we just did it," says Scott. The company made sure the rest of the counter-







top was kept simple with clean lines so as not to take the focus away from the island. “You could tell that they wanted it to look good because they knew their name was behind it,” says Connie. “A couple of times, they just bit the bullet and did things that they felt were needed. I didn’t recognize that and they did. They took the extra step.” Connie says they had also planned to accent the living-room fireplace with granite, but instead chose to follow Scott’s suggestion that the lighter look of marble would be a better fit. Once again, Connie and Howard found that Scott’s advice was right on the mark to achieving the look they wanted.

BUILDING TO FIT YOUR LIFESTYLE

When homeowners purchase a used home, they generally have two options: they can try to live within the design of the previous homeowner or they can embark on a series of renovations in an attempt to express their

personal tastes on somebody else’s canvas. Building a custom home, on the other hand, allows homeowners to cultivate a personal sanctuary catered to their specific needs, complete with all of the comforts they require to enjoy life to the fullest.

Upon entering the home, guests are greeted with an open view of the large kitchen and living room, complete with coffered ceilings and a stunning fireplace. Distressed hardwood floors throughout the main level keep with Connie’s old-world look, as do her choice of light fixtures.

The expansive master bedroom—the only bedroom on the main floor—also features a coffered ceiling, hardwood floor and fireplace. Connie chose to raise the fireplace from its standard location so that it would be visible from the bed. Although this posed a challenge for Garry because of the placement of the living room fireplace on the opposite side of the wall, Connie says he readily set to work finding a way to make it happen.

“Garry was very easy to work with. He was very open to my ideas, not negative right from the get-go. He was just positive,” says Connie. “He’d never say, ‘We can’t,’ and that’s what made it such a good experience.”

The old-world appeal of the main level is carried into the couple’s ensuite bathroom through details such as the travertine tile walls, glass-walled shower complete with pebbled floor, and hand-glazed cabinetry. Initially, Connie had planned to include both a large walk-in closet and a main-floor laundry room off the ensuite, but the shape of the lot meant there wasn’t enough room for both.

Having to make small concessions can sometimes be part of the building process, but most homeowners will find that they have a great say in what those concessions are when they work with a custom home-builder who understands what they want. In this situation, Connie opted to keep the large closet and move the laundry room



downstairs, where there was plenty of space. “It was not a problem once I made the decision. We did it, and I’m very happy,” she says.

A stairway near the master suite leads to a private, second-storey alcove, complete with both large window peaks and skylights. For other homeowners, the space would lend itself well to use as an office or even a children’s playroom; for Connie, it only has one ideal purpose—to serve as her sewing studio. “Of course, because sewing is our business, this room was very important to me,” she says.

From the main floor, another stairway leads down to the walkout basement. The low, wall-recessed lights along the stairway give guests the first indication that the home’s lower level will have a more contemporary appearance.

One of the most eye-catching features of the lower level is the tiled, wide-screen fireplace. Rather than focusing the attention on the immediate area surrounding the fireplace, the Luedtkes chose to continue the slate-coloured tile surround across the

entire wall. “We wanted to make a big statement, so we went across the whole wall. When people walk down here, it’s the first thing that catches their attention because it definitely is a focus wall,” says Connie.

Although it includes an impressive laundry room, storage area, bathroom and two bedrooms—one of which has already been claimed for use by the couple’s granddaughter when she visits—the focus of the lower level is the sizeable great room and ingenious corner mini kitchen. With its own dishwasher, fridge, and microwave, Connie says the smaller custom kitchen will make entertaining on their lower deck much more convenient, because it eliminates the need to run upstairs to the main kitchen.

Most of the exterior work, including the stucco, stone, deck and railing, was completed by Bar T Construction and Prestainer Ltd., a company owned by a member of the Luedtkes’ family. Howard says he appreciated Garry’s willingness to work with Bar T Construction on their home, and found

that everyone worked well under Garry’s leadership. “They respect his knowledge and eagerness to do a good job,” he says.

PLANNING PAYS OFF

The Luedtkes initially invested a lot of time in planning their new home, but found that their efforts paid off by making the rest of the process easier. “I found that, through spending time looking at books, when it came time to pick things out, I had a pretty good feel for who I was and what I wanted,” Connie says. “It made it a very good experience that way.”

Even though they had concrete ideas of what they liked and disliked before they began, Howard and Connie both found that working with Emerald Park Homes and trades people like CNG Stone Products and Cougar Custom Cabinets, whose expertise they could rely on, made a big difference when it came to making the right decisions along the way. “All along, the tradespeople we’ve dealt with have been excellent,” says Howard. “Really, they went all out.”

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