



Beautiful homes in your neighbourhood



Maybe a home tour is for you

BY JOANNE SHUTTLEWORTH
PHOTOGRAPHY • CRESTINA MARTINS

Tara O'Donnell had a long love of house tours, a bunch of neighbours who had recently done kitchen renovations and a compassionate heart when she learned Haven House, a women's shelter in Cambridge, had not reached its fundraising goals.

In an "aha" moment, the Kitchener woman decided to see if she could garner enough support to hold a tour of these kitchens to raise funds for Haven House.

"It was 'from our home for your home' kind of thinking," O'Donnell said in an interview. "I also sit on the Auditorium Neighbourhood Association and it's our goal to do grassroots activities. I thought this would be perfect."

In fact, she would like to see other neighbourhoods copy the concept.

"We don't own this idea," she says. "I would like to see it in different parts of the city. And it could be for different charities. There's a lot of room to do a tour that suits your neighbourhood."

"People shy away from volunteer work thinking they don't have the time. But it doesn't have to be complicated. This was pretty simple to organize and once the tour is over, you're done."

There are a few large-scale home and garden tours in Kitchener already, and O'Donnell didn't want to compete with them. This was always intended to be a tour within the neighbourhood, she says.

So to keep it small and manageable, only 10 homes were on the tour and only 100 tickets were sold at \$25 each. It ran for three hours on a Sunday afternoon in January – during that lull after Christmas and before life gears up again, she says.

Most of the promotion and communication happened over Facebook, keeping costs to a minimum. The tickets were paid for before tour day. The neighbourhood association helped cover some printing costs for tickets, posters and flowers for the homeowners on tour day.



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TARA O'DONNELL

Many of the homeowners provided refreshments or found sponsors to do so.

One of the homeowners was also a graphic artist and she designed the tickets. Louise Jessup makes framed stylized maps that she sells on Etsy through her business "All Over the Map." The tour tickets used that same format, featuring a map of the Auditorium neighbourhood and the tour home locations.

"She does these cool maps and we had such good feedback on the tickets," O'Donnell says. "After the tour she continued to sell the maps and that money went to Haven House as well."

O'Donnell says her neighbourhood also holds a porch party in the summer with a musician playing on every porch.

She's planning a second home tour for

January 2018 and already has a dozen homes lined up. But instead of having a kitchen focus, this one is a Mystery Tour, she says, including basement, bathroom and attic renovations.

"These small efforts can make a big difference in building a sense of neighbourhood. And helping worthwhile charities," she notes.

Anyone wanting more information on organizing a home tour can contact O'Donnell through the Auditorium Neighbourhood Association at Auditoriumna@gmail.com.

A closer look at two kitchens that were featured on the Auditorium Neighbourhood Association tour. See pages 60 and 66.



Island living

Large kitchen island inspires renovation and becomes the heart of the Guenther family's Kitchener home

BY JOANNE SHUTTLEWORTH
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Kristine Guenther perches on a stool next to her massive kitchen island while her nine-year-old daughter, Olivia, finishes her after-school snack and dashes off with friends.

Guenther's son Jack, 11, comes in a short while later, grabs peanut butter and bread and makes himself a sandwich. Then he, too, is out the door with a second wave of friends.

Guenther apologizes for the disruption and for the items left on the counter.

"I'm glad you're not taking photos today," she says with a laugh. "This is how we really live though. And that's really why we did this renovation."

The 75-year-old house they bought six years ago on Merner Avenue in Kitchener had many original architectural features, a decent-sized yard and was in a neighbourhood they loved. But even with a family-room addition from the 1970s, the compartmentalized layout of the main floor made every room feel small and separated.

"We knew we would do this reno when we bought the house," Guenther says, adding she and her husband, Braden, had renovated the kitchen in their former home and had some idea of what they were getting into.

But that was without children and here they had two. And this reno involved opening a structural wall and relocating the kitchen, thereby jumpstarting further renovations.

A stainless-steel fridge is tucked into a bank of cupboards. The large island holds a deep kitchen sink, dishwasher, microwave and plenty of lower storage drawers.





LEFT: Olivia Guenther adjusts the blinds in the kitchen that gets the afternoon sun.
BELOW: A pot-filler over the gas range eliminates a trip to the sink.

Plus Braden took on most of the work himself, with help from some handy family and friends, adding to the stress and the timelines of the project. The 41-year-old worked his day job and came home and worked on the renovation – drywall, plumbing, millwork and all. Hardly a break for about a year, Kristine said.

“It was a marriage tester for sure,” Kristine, 42, says with a laugh. “But it’s so rewarding when it’s done. And it’s made such a difference.”

The old kitchen acts as a mudroom now, with a powder room, closet space for each family member and a piano where the kids practise. This is also a major intersection in the house with access to the front and side door, stairs up to the bedrooms and down to the basement and, of course, an opening to the new kitchen. The kitchen now

sprawls across the back of the house and features double doors to a deck and the backyard, a sitting area, ample cupboard and counter space, and easy access to the dining room.

But central to the kitchen and a life-changer in terms of how this family lives, is the massive eight-by-5½-foot island. It holds a deep kitchen sink and dishwasher, a microwave, plenty of lower storage drawers and easily seats eight to 10 people on bar stools.

The dark-coloured lower cupboards in the island contrast with the white cupboards in the rest of the kitchen. But the pièce de résistance is the countertop – granite that is buffed but not polished with a leather-like texture. Kristine chose it because it’s both beautiful and conceals a lot of sins. “We get the afternoon

sun and it really shows the fingerprints,” she says. “I just love how easy the leathered granite is to live with.”

There’s a pot-filler over the gas range and a stainless-steel fridge tucked into a bank of cupboards. There’s a separate beverage centre with kettle and coffee maker, storage for glassware and easy-clean quartz counters for parties.

A deck and outdoor seating area, added since completing the kitchen, is the crowning touch.

“We have a large family and this is great for gatherings,” Kristine says, adding it doesn’t matter if it’s a kitchen ceiling for the grownups or a sleepover for the kids. “I really wanted a big island. It’s the meeting place.”

Kristine says they were advised to live in the house before starting the renovation and she’s glad they did. It allowed them to really understand the house and to fine-tune their plans to get the most storage and the best flow.

But they also lived in the house during the renovation, which was tricky. They painted the bedrooms before starting the project so they’d have a place to retreat, where no tools or drywall dust were allowed. And they were able to use the old kitchen until it came time to lay new hand-scraped hardwood maple flooring throughout the main floor near the end of the project.

“That’s when I started washing dishes in the laundry sink,” she says.

Although Olympia Kitchens in Waterloo helped them figure out the kitchen layout, “it was my husband who had the vision. He could see what opening that one wall would do.

“It was hard – any renovation is hard,” Kristine says. “You really have to see the end vision and work out how to get there.”



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*A kitchen
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Jamie Pohlko and Louise Jessup keep busy with children, William and Clark, in the updated kitchen of their Pandora Crescent home.



BY JOANNE SHUTTLEWORTH
PHOTOGRAPHY • CRESTINA MARTINS

Jamie Pohlko and Louise Jessup were pretty excited when they had the opportunity to buy Jessup's family home on Lydia Street from her mother, and they did extensive renovations there. It was going to be their forever home.

But when a property came for sale just around the corner on Pandora Crescent, Jessup couldn't resist taking a peek. And then she was smitten.

The homes on this street almost never come up for sale, and with their bigger lawns and more square footage, Pandora might just be one of the most coveted streets in Kitchener.

But the house, some 80 years old, had not kept up with the times. The previous owner bought the house in 1952 and lived in it for 50 years.

"It was like opening the door to 1950," says Pohlko, 36.

The living room was large and there was a back room that had been used as a den. But the eat-in kitchen was small and cut off from the rest of the house. And the formal dining room was just not what the Jessups wanted.

But at least the size of the house was ample for a family of four. Most of the original hardwood floors could be salvaged. And the unpainted gumwood trim that ran throughout the house was in good



condition. So renovating this house was not as big a job as their previous home.

"Here we could work within the confines of the house and not add to the footprint," Jessup says. "We didn't want to do a big renovation again, like we did at Lydia."

Still, this renovation was big enough and the family owned two houses for a few months while Pandora was gutted, reconfigured and refinished. Steel beams were added in order to remove walls. Windows became doors and doors became walls as the main floor was transformed.

The main goal of the renovation was to open the wall between the kitchen and dining room to create one big, open family room/kitchen. The existing living room was

large enough to hold a seating area in front of the fireplace as well as a proper dining room table for larger gatherings. And the back den is now a playroom with clear views from the kitchen sink and island after the existing opening was widened. They also changed a window to a door for access to the backyard from the kitchen.

Jessup, 40, says because they had spent so much time sourcing materials for the Lydia Street renovation, they decided to duplicate those choices in the Pandora Crescent home. So the faucets, range hood and sinks are the same as in their previous home.

But they also took the opportunity to solve a few problems they had created in their previous reno.

Previous reno experience made updating this Pandora Crescent home easier. A friend who is a kitchen designer helped design the kitchen layout.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Artwork and messages can be found on a large sheet of metal painted with black chalkboard paint.

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Widening an existing opening allows a clear view from the kitchen into the back den that is now a playroom.

“Jamie is the cook and I do the cleaning up, and we had a problem with our other kitchen with the sink and the stove too close to each other. So we solved that here. It helps having a second sink too,” Jessup says.

Their hearts were set on granite counters with brown and grey veining and that proved a challenge to find, especially since they needed 13-foot slabs. They eventually found the River Gold slabs at a place in Markham.

“When I grew up, it was the dining room table where we dumped our stuff. Now it’s the island,” Jessup says. “I could do without the junk, but this island is the centre of everything.”

A friend of the family, Barb Thorne, is a kitchen designer and she helped them work out the layout. The space is long and narrow and it took some time to figure out how to get an island in there without obstructing the flow. In the end, they opted for a narrow island that drops to

table height at the end. Chairs are much safer for small children than bar stools, Jessup says, another mistake they made in their other home.

Another friend, Hugh Black, welded the table legs and they are painted a fun green colour to add punch to the neutral palette. Black also supplied and framed a large sheet of metal that Jessup painted with black chalkboard paint. This is where the kids – William, 6, and Clark, 2 – hang their artwork and scribble messages, and where the family calendar is posted in plain view.

Poholko’s brother, Dean, is a cabinetmaker and they flew him in from Edmonton to construct and install a custom walnut pantry cupboard. The wood adds warmth to the white cupboards and ties in to the trim in the rest of the house.

“We were very lucky that way,” Jessup says. “That’s also what makes this kitchen so special to us. So many people we love had a hand in it.”

The shape of things to come is here now

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