

THE STAR

Five years and \$1+ million recreates Trinity-Bellwoods ‘grand old dame’



When it comes to the construction process, David Weenen is no stranger to surprises.

Growing up on job sites around Toronto, he helped his father renovate and restore old Victorian homes before becoming a master electrician and getting into the home building business as the owner of [David Weenen Design Build Inc.](#)

With decades of experience, he thought he'd seen it all when peeling back the walls of older houses. Until he started a renovation in Toronto's [Trinity-Bellwoods](#) neighbourhood.

It began in 2014, when he stumbled upon a “grand old dame” and immediately felt compelled to take it on as an investment project. “I wanted to buy it and turn it into something pretty the second I walked in the door.



Home builder David Weenen installed a custom kitchen in the Victorian “grand old dame” he rebuilt and is now selling.

“I know Victorian houses like this. I appreciated the esthetic first and foremost and, secondly, there was nothing that was going to intimidate me. Or so I thought,” Weenen says.

The Victorian façade had had the charm painted out of it, 10 times over. The building inspection report listed termite damage. The interior had fallen into disrepair. Yet he could think of nothing but the restoration of the formerly beautiful old home.

It sat empty for six months after purchase while Weenen finished client projects and mulled over renovation plans. When he was ready to tackle it, he did it with his signature confidence. “I went in with a cavalier approach. I figured, ‘How bad can it be?’ Even if it’s completely infested (with termites), I can just level it and build it up again,” said Weenen.

Famous last words.



The first jaw-dropper came when the levelling process began. “I got a phone call from one of my guys saying, ‘Dave, there’s a lot of banging on the walls.’” Confused, Weenen took a look at the exterior wall they were about to take down. “I poked a screwdriver through the barnboard and saw my neighbour sitting in his living room.”

Turns out, the detached house he thought he had purchased was, in fact, firmly attached. This new development sent the project off course as they navigated new permits and construction plans to accommodate a different structural environment.

The master bedroom is illuminated by one of the second floor’s four skylights and features a Juliet balcony.

The second hammer dropped when they opened up the house further to discover that termites had eviscerated the structure. “From the front to the rear, from the ground to the roof, termites had been eating this house for a long time. There wasn’t a sound structural beam in the building.”



This meant the whole house had to be rebuilt, including new ceiling joists, plus exterior and interior walls — all without entirely levelling it. “We had to get orders from the city, one wall at a time, to remediate the failed structure.”

After almost five years of construction and costs that ballooned well beyond what Weenen anticipated, the exterior of 52 Argyle St. bears all the hallmarks of a Victorian home, complete with brand new bricks that match the colour and dimensions of the originals. Marvin Windows and Doors replicated the front door and seven arched windows throughout the house — to the tune of \$35,000.

Master electrician David Weenen thought he had seen it all in 2014 when he took on renovating a historic home that was known to have termites. His crew’s first surprise, among many was finding out it was an attached home, not detached.

Inside, it’s a light-filled, high-ceilinged, three-bedroom home infused with possibilities. Unsure of the profile of the ultimate buyer, Weenen embedded choice and flexibility on every floor.

With a separate entrance, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and washer/dryer in the basement, he's made the lower level easy to convert it into a 700-sq.-ft. apartment. The main floor stairs are designed to accommodate a two-by-10 foot oak frame that can be mounted to the drywall to sealed off the basement.

Glass panels bordering the stairway allow natural light to flow through the house.

The second-floor features four skylights, two of which reside in two smaller bedrooms which can be knocked down to make one larger room. And if an enterprising buyer wants to make the house three separate apartments, that would work, too. "The second bathroom can become a kitchen," said Weenen.



A small deck can be added to the Juliet balcony in the master bedroom — or a walkway to the roof of a potential carport above the back pad parking. "I'm thinking a green roof would be beautiful," he said.

"I don't know if young people are that affluent now where they can carry a \$2.5 million house. I've allowed for any possible configuration when it comes to using the space, whether you want to use the whole house or turn it into three separate units and work your way up to using all of it."

When it came to finishes, the builder in Weenen couldn't resist splurging on top-of-the-line everything. "My friends and family all told me to just get it done and get out, but I can't skimp. It's not in my nature."

Flexibility is built into the house, with a basement that can be made a separate suite.



Some of the finishes include:

- \$17/sq. ft., 3/4-inch, oiled oak flooring that was stained on site and built to last 75 years.
- Solid oak 2-1/4-inch hardwood stairs.
- High-end custom trim from [Brenlo Custom Wood Mouldings & Doors](#).
- Glycol-heated porcelain tiles throughout the basement. Outdoor stairs and walkways are also heated.
- Top-line European appliances, including two dishwashers and two washers/dryers.
- Halo halogen lighting throughout the house.
- Custom kitchens and under-stair storage in the basement.
- With the renovation behind him, Weenen puts it into perspective.

“(Renovating houses) is sort of like having kids. A few hiccups along the

way, outrageous amounts of capital and fiscal and emotional turmoil but — in the end — I love every single one.”



The numbers

\$700,000: Cost of house in 2014

\$600,000: Original budget of renovation

\$1 million+: Actual cost of renovation

\$2.45 million: Price of listing



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