

# Back to the future for HN Homes

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OTTAWA — One of the city's largest land barons has teamed up with an architectural master of contemporary design to launch a new building company that promises to bring clean-lined, custom-like living to the suburbs.



Called HN Homes ([hnhomes.com](http://hnhomes.com)), the launch is “fortuitous timing” in a soft market, says Patrick Meeds, who heads up the new home division for industry consultant PMA Brethour Realty Group. New home sales are struggling, slipping to 4,024 for 2013, which is 20 per cent below the 10-year average for the city.



“HN Homes are opening in the spring market with full models in an established community with something that is different in a market that is slowly returning to health,” says Meeds.



Earlier this month, carpenters and plumbers were clambering over four single homes in the heart of Bridlewood, getting them ready for the May launch of a company named after Herb Nadolny, patriarch of a large family with 14 grandchildren and entrepreneurial roots that go back more than five decades, when he began buying large tracts of land with school chum and business partner Lyon Sachs.

The two, as Urbandale Corporation, bought their first chunk of land off St. Laurent Boulevard in the mid-'50s, building homes in Elmvale Acres. Through the years, they polished a sterling reputation, also constructing apartments, condos and office buildings.

They quietly went about buying up land in Riverside South, Bridlewood and Kanata, waiting patiently for demand and development to catch up. As a result, Urbandale Corp. is one of the largest landowners inside the urban boundary, a trump card in an industry being strangled by a shortage of serviced land.

The Sachs and Nadolny families both own half of that land development company, while ownership of the homebuilding arm — Urbandale Construction — eventually shrank to Sachs and his family, who have built suburban communities of affordable townhomes to big single homes, earning design and service awards and accolades for green building techniques along the way.

Now the extended Nadolny family is re-entering the homebuilding arena, banking on the star power of Ottawa architect Chris Simmonds, whose office shelves are filled with national, provincial and local design awards for flowing custom homes where inside spaces merge with outdoor landscaping thanks to large panels of glass.

Last fall, Simmonds dominated the Housing Design Awards put on by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association, taking home nine trophies, including the prestigious Peoples' Choice Award for a sunny, modern ultra-green home in New Edinburgh.

“Chris Simmonds is going to put us on the map,” says Lawrence Nadolny, during a visit to the four partially built homes in Bridlewood. “These are new, fresh designs that have not been seen in the suburbs.”

Lawrence is the son of Herb, who died in 2005 at age 77. There are also three sisters and brother-in-law Lawrence Weinstein, a highly regarded lawyer who describes himself as the pusher, driving the formation of HN Homes.

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“We decided to go into the homebuilding business and build a legacy for our family,” says Weinstein, who sits on the board of Urbandale Corp. Nadolny and Weinstein are co-chairmen of HN Homes and are dedicated to continuing Herb Nadolny’s early commitment to building quality homes and using service to create “an ultra-satisfied customer for life.”

Stacking the cards in their favour, Nadolny and Weinstein have hired George Georgaras away from Uniform Urban Developments, relying on the veteran builder’s commitment to details and reputation for high standards.

“I wanted the challenge of building a company from scratch,” says Georgaras, who headhunted Simmonds for his timeless contemporary designs. It’s Simmonds’ first partnership with a large builder.

“I remember my first conversation with Chris. He basically said he wasn’t interested if we wanted to build the same old thing in the suburbs.”

The Simmonds’ collection of 11 single-family homes are a contemporary interpretation with corner windows, details on the side and rear of the homes and not an ounce of vinyl siding.

“I don’t do vinyl siding,” says Simmonds, while waiting for a plane in Australia. “It is Hardie board and comes in 30 different colours.”

Georgaras doesn’t believe in green labels, but that doesn’t mean the homes aren’t efficient. They include extra insulation in ceilings, walls and floors, quality windows and high-efficiency furnaces.

Inside, there are few interior walls and ceilings range from nine to 12 feet. Often, the staircase will be tucked to the side of the home, lit by a window and accented by solid walls instead of spindles and railings. “It gives a sculptural, modern look,” says Simmonds, who also did away with a formal dining room and a traditional breakfast nook. Instead, the kitchen and eating island are oversized, with a neighbouring dining area.

“The kitchen is where everyone hangs out. Kids do their homework. Only senior lawyers would use a formal dining room. I wanted to design a home for the way people live,” says Simmonds. He also positioned the fireplace in the middle of the living room, instead of on an outside wall, allowing furniture to be clustered around it.

“Again, it is the way people live and I wanted a home where you can arrange furniture properly.”

The single-family homes in Bridlewood will range from 2,180 square feet on a 35-foot lot to a 3,620-square-foot home on a 50-foot lot (there will also be 44-foot lots), with prices starting in the high \$400,000s.

“These are not homes for first-time buyers,” acknowledges Georgaras. “They are for buyers who appreciate modern designs.”

The site has room for about 220 lots, which will be split between Urbandale Construction and HN Homes.

HN also has plans for two or three townhome models in Riverside South later this year and then a site in Kanata, all on land owned by Urbandale Corp.