

Modern reigns, but diversity shines at Housing Design Awards



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Architect Barry Hobin and Roca Homes used extensive glazing, limestone and a garden courtyard to connect a contemporary bungalow on a vacant lot with its natural surroundings. The home won custom urban infill, 2,401 to 3,099 sq. ft.



Modern design may be the heavyweight on the Ottawa housing scene, but diversity is calling the shots if winners at the 31st annual Housing Design Awards are any indication.



From the clean lines of contemporary minimalism to an Arts and Crafts renovation and the funky mid-century-influenced decor in a sleek downtown model condo, Saturday night's awards gala at the Ottawa Convention centre was a celebration of both design variety and excellence.



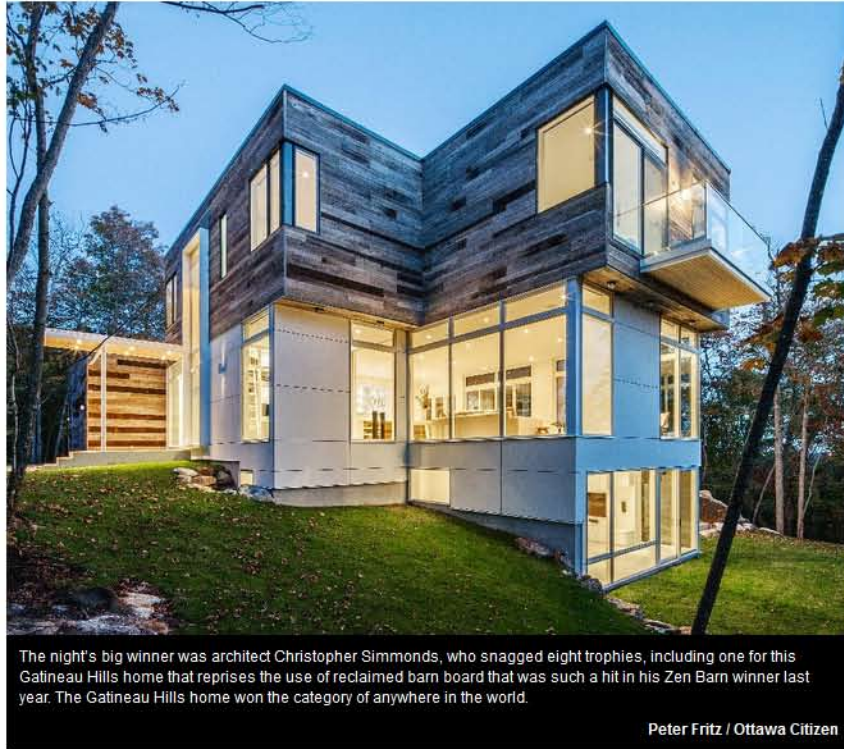
The awards are hosted by the Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association and sponsored by the Citizen.



“There’s a real creative use of space (in Ottawa),” Toronto-based Ani Bogovic, one of this year’s judges, said in a pre-gala interview. A business development manager with Homes Publishing, she was speaking about infill projects, but her words apply equally to the broader housing scene. “Ottawa’s going a little bit modern but with a good balance of modern and traditional in the designs.”

Chalk the balance and eclecticism up to the influence of the Internet, travel, immigration, whatever — our once design-cautious city is more open to a rainbow of ideas than ever.

And with this year’s submissions for the design awards skyrocketing to an unprecedented 241 entries in 43 categories, subsequently whittled down to 158 finalists, as well as an influx of new faces, it’s clear the housing industry is bullish on offering variety to buyers while diversifying itself.



Speaking of bullish, architect Christopher Simmonds reprised his big wins of the last couple of years by snagging the most prizes on Saturday: eight, spread across custom homes, renovations, kitchens and other categories.

Simmonds' wins included a stunning home in the Gatineau Hills distinguished by contemporary concepts such as open interior spaces and acres of glazing combined with a kitchen sporting a modern rustic look. Reclaimed board on the exterior speaks to a modern use of traditional elements and recalls the reclaimed barn board of Simmonds' urban Zen Barn home that netted so many prizes last year.

He also won the two new exterior awards — details and living space — which numbered among the six new categories introduced this year. RND Construction won with Simmonds in the exterior categories.

"I'm really happy that good design is appreciated. Our projects this year were small. You don't have to have a big house to have a beautiful house," said Simmonds after gathering up his armload of awards.

Other architects on the winners' roster included Barry J. Hobin, whose projects included a partnership with custom builder Roca Homes on a home in Rockcliffe Park. It edged out Linda Chapman and Maple Leaf Homes to take the trophy in one of the four urban infill categories.

Built on a vacant lot, the bungalow is contemporary but connects with its natural surroundings via materials such as limestone and a garden courtyard. It also features extensive glazing and, unexpectedly, glass inserts in the main floor so that natural light floods the entire home.

Roca, which teamed up with Hobin for two awards last year, also won this year's new Custom Builder of the Year award.

"It's great. It's a validation for what we're doing, that we're identifying ourselves as builders of high-end homes," said Roca's (smiling) president Roberto Campagna at the gala.

Among the big builders, Cardel Homes toted off the lion's share of prizes with four trophies. Their winning entries included the richly appointed Encore for single detached home in the 2,600- to 3,499-square-foot category (its spiral staircase is a dizzying knockout), two production kitchen awards shared with Deslaurier Custom Cabinets, and the newly minted Production Builder of the Year award.

"We're thrilled to be recognized. It's kudos to our team," said Greg Graham, Cardel's Ottawa president.



Richcraft's Canmore model mixes urban chic with touches of rustic. It took the prize for production homes, single detached, 2,001 to 2,599 sq. ft., \$500,000 and under.

Miv Photography / Ottawa Citizen

Other big builder winners included Richcraft, which garnered two prizes, including one for its single-family Canmore model. That home boasts a thoroughly modern exterior but on the inside jauntily mixes urban chic with touches of rustic thanks to modern white cabinetry in the kitchen, wide plank flooring in the living room, and Craftsman-style wainscoting and other elements elsewhere.

One of the new kids on the block, Greely-based Greenmark Builders, beat out veteran production builders Corvinelli and Richcraft to scoop up top honours for its Ironwood bungalow in the detached, under 2,000 square feet category.

"It was crazy; I had no idea," said Greenmark president Mark Kranenburg. The bungalow is the company's most popular model according to Kranenburg, who set up Greenmark just five years ago. "It's an open concept and our best-value plan," he said in an earlier interview. It's got no dining room, so you're gaining a lot of square footage."

Kranenburg promises to be back. "We'll go big next year."

Allowing competitors to submit entries online instead of using the old, bulky method of physical photographs and project descriptions helped account for the number of new faces like Greenmark this year, said GOHBA executive director John Herbert.

And using judges mostly from other cities helped stimulate the diversity in award winners, he said. "We were seeing one architectural style being selected: glass, hard edges, cold. The warmer solutions weren't winning. It wasn't healthy for the design industry and we needed to get out of that cycle."

The renovations category saw plenty of familiar faces and some warm solutions in the winners' circle. They included Amsted Design-Build joining forces with Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development to transform a cottage-style home into an Arts and Crafts-inspired beauty whose sightline from foyer to backyard helps dissolve the interior/exterior barrier. Amsted also won renovator of the year, an award the company has won multiple times.



When their home was destroyed by fire, the owners of this riverfront property brought in Terra Nova Building Corp. and used the opportunity to create a new home that complements the river setting and takes advantage of the views. The project won the award for custom home, 4,000 sq. ft. or more.

Alan Higginson / Ottawa Citizen

As always, kitchens and bathrooms saw a flood of submissions, telling us that kitchens remain the stylish heart of the home and bathrooms a place to unwind in ever-increasing luxury.

Astro Design Centre, always attuned to European trends, won for a minimalist custom kitchen in a modern Westboro townhome. It pushes boundaries by mixing — with dramatic effect — grained European veneer, black glass, soapstone and plank white oak floors with a charcoal stain.

Competitors in the custom kitchen category blended contemporary and rustic, and, in one case, cheerily splashed orange and red accents on the backsplash and pendant lights.

Upstart Linebox Studio and Irpinia Kitchens captured the two custom bathroom awards, with Linebox creating a six-foot polished concrete sink in a tranquil aqua blue.

Design First Interiors, which captured five awards, including one for a custom kitchen with a gorgeous divider wall of cherry veneer display cabinets, took the housing detail prize for a floating staircase.

“Not only were the stairs unique and appealing but they also evoked a feeling of wonder,” wrote judge Steven Crowell, president of Crowell Construction in Kentville, N.S., in a pre-gala email. “Not every day do you come across a stairway that looks like it is floating on air.”

Other winners included, in one of two condo categories, Claridge Homes with that mid-century-influenced vibe in its Tribeca model suite.

The People's Choice Award, voted on by visitors to last month's Home & Design Show, went to Christopher Simmonds Architect and RND Construction in the new exterior living space category. They won for a fabulous dual-level deck with a sheltered outdoor kitchen.