



Pieter Venema,
Co-Owner of Royal Homes

Model behaviour

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS THWAITES

Inspiration for your custom home is found in creative spaces

Whether you're building a grand cottage or something a bit more modest, little details can add up to a big difference.

From luxurious finishes to elegant use of space, there are a host of ways to make your cottage look and feel more luxurious or spacious, without adding a great deal to the budget, says Pieter Venema.

One of the owners of Royal Homes, Pieter has been

building cottages and homes throughout Ontario for 25 years. Royal Homes is particularly known for its use of prefab construction – large parts of most of their homes are constructed indoors under controlled conditions, then delivered and lifted into place with cranes. On some projects the entire building is created inside the factory; on others, the prefab components only form a small part of the project and the rest is built on-site. “All our homes are custom, so we use whichever

building techniques make the most sense for a given project,” says Pieter.

Before the building starts, though, every project begins the same way: with a meeting between a designer and a customer inside a model home. This is where they sort out the details that will produce an outstanding home.

Super models

“Some of our customers show up with nearly complete plans that they just want adjusted,”

says Pieter. “But most people have a folder full of ideas, pictures and floor plans. It's up to our designers to help them sort through all that. That's where a visit to a model home really comes in handy.”

In fact, Royal Homes has nine model homes, located at half a dozen design centres. “Even people who have a fairly clear idea of what they want to build can usually find something they want to borrow from one of our model homes,” says Pieter.

The models range from a 1,500 square-foot bungalow in Peterborough to the 3,000 square-foot Lakeview in Gravenhurst, ideas and inspiration can be found in all of them. The Bala at the Innisfil design centre, for example, is all about understated luxury – just 1,600 square feet, it's a showcase of how much can be achieved in a relatively small space.

It's one of the company's most popular models, but it also provided inspiration for one of the firm's larger builds last year.



Lakeview model at the Gravenhurst Design Centre.

“We completed a large cottage with five ensuite bathrooms, and every one of them was based on the ensuite in the Bala model,” Pieter says. “The clients walked through this model, and really couldn't see any way to improve on this bathroom design.”

Small details

The Bala also offers examples of the way small design details can make maximum use of space.

The living room, for example, has a number of touches that make it look and feel much larger than its 19 by 14 feet would suggest. A gas fireplace in a room of this size has the potential to intrude and eat a great deal of floor space. But in this model the hearth is installed flush with the floor, meaning there's nothing to step around as you pass in front of the fireplace. “It's a small detail, but it makes a big difference every time you walk through the room,” Pieter says.

The design also uses changes in ceiling height and slope to create two distinct zones – one for sitting and one for passing through en route to the bedrooms – without infringing on the room's spaciousness. The sitting area has a cathedral ceiling, dressed with painted pine and box beams. But along the back edge of the room, the ceiling drops to a flat eight feet. This creates the impression of a hallway without actually giving up any floor space.

“Unless you're experienced at reading blueprints, it would be very difficult to look at a plan and understand how those little details will affect the flow of a room,” Pieter says. “But walk through a model, and you suddenly get it.”

These details – like every aspect of the model homes – exist purely as suggestions. “A custom home is exactly that: it's custom,” says Pieter. “If

the client wants a different plan, or different finishes, we can do that.”

Site visit

Of course, the building is only one part of a new home: the land is also a key element. “We always do a site visit with the client, to see the property where they're going to build,” says Pieter. “Very often our designers can suggest ways to make the best use of the property, often in ways the client hasn't thought possible.”

A walkout basement is a classic example, he says. Homeowners often think they can't build one, only to find that Royal Homes' designers can see a way to make it happen. “Dirt's easy to move,” Pieter says with a grin.

It may not be a little detail, but it is one more element that makes a home truly custom. **DS**

BY ANDREW WAGNER-CHAZALON



Bala model at the Innisfil Design Centre.



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