

THE ART OF *Design*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW FEARMAN

A modern retreat designed for people and their paintings

An open concept design with plenty of windows is a fantastic way to make a home feel bright and airy. But homeowners who are also art collectors have a problem: with few interior walls, where do you hang the art?

On top of that, all the light streaming in through big

windows may make people smile, but it can be a serious problem for paintings.

For homeowners Todd and Bruce and their designer Erica Fortin, the solution was to plan for the art when designing the house: rather than building the house and then deciding where to hang the paintings,

they knew before construction even began which pieces would hang on which wall. “Wall location was very important,” says Erica, a lead designer with Royal Homes.

“Even the location of the pot lights was planned with the art in mind – we knew how many feet each light needed

to be away from the wall in order to illuminate the artwork properly.”

Modernist taste

Todd and Bruce met Erica at a Royal Homes design centre. They were exploring design ideas for a weekend getaway home on land that had once belonged to Todd’s grandfather. They had seen lots of traditional designs, but told Erica what they really wanted was something more modern: could she draw something up?

As it turns out, she didn’t need to. “I had drawn up a modern design years earlier,” Erica says, explaining that it was just an idea she wanted to explore. “I was just waiting for the right client to come along who would like it.”

“I pulled it out, and they fell in love with it.”

just the starting point: like many Royal Homes projects, the end result was further customized to suit the site, the clients, and – in this case – the artwork.

The house sits on a slight knoll, peering into a rich landscape of mature hardwoods. The view into the forest is celebrated through a wall of glass windows that dominates the great room and kitchen.

With the tops of the panes 11 feet off the floor, the windows can catch even the low winter sun as it peeks over the tops of the trees; in summer, the thick canopy of deciduous leaves blocks much of the light, ensuring the house doesn’t become too hot.

To make the most of the view, Todd was adamant that the deck should have as few railings as

possible. “You’re open to the woods, so you want to allow the woods to come in,” he explains. That meant the deck could be no more than two feet off the ground. That, along with requirements from the local conservation authority, dictated the final positioning of the house.

While the forest side of the house is glass, the side facing the road has barely any windows at all. “There’s not a view on that side,” Bruce explains. That also adds an element of security to a home that’s mainly used on weekends – with no windows on the driveway side, it’s difficult for any unwanted visitors to be sure if anybody is at home. “It’s a fortress to the front, and open to the back,” Bruce says.

In addition, the lack of windows on that side creates a few walls which receive no natural light at all – a perfect spot to hang some of the more delicate paintings.

Dark wood

The modern aesthetic is seen in the low sloping roofline, with ceilings that rise from eight feet at the front of the house to 12 feet at the back. The interior trim is wood, in keeping with the rural nature of the site. The dark wood doors, trim and casings create a very clean and simple profile, which contributes to the overall simplicity of the design. The darker rough-sawn beams against the lighter toned tongue-and-groove ceiling complement the hardwood flooring.

“A lot of the trend we’re seeing these days is white-washed woodwork, very light inside,” she says. Having abundant light allows dark wood to make a bold statement without being overwhelming. “And the dark wood really lets the art collection stand out,” Erica says.

A tall stone fireplace in the great room adds an element of grandeur as well as a practical touch – clearing the site and the driveway left years of firewood available.

The home was built in the Royal Homes factory, and shipped in two modules. Todd and Bruce chose to work with local contractors to clear the trees, build the driveway, and bring services to the site; Royal Homes took care of the septic system.

The home was delivered at the end of October; by Christmas, it was ready to move in. **DS**

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