

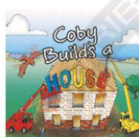
Read all about an elephant, a crane and a little boy, in Coby Builds a House

It's not often that a builder becomes involved in book publishing, but the powers that be behind Geranium Homes has released *Coby Builds a House*, a children's book for pre-schoolers. Aw! Boaz Feiner, vice-president of the housing division, commissioned the 18-page book, which was released on Sept. 11. Proceeds from the sale (the suggested donation is \$10) will be given to various charities

BUILDER'S BRAINSTORM

and non-profit organizations; the book can be purchased through geraniumhomes.com. A second-generation builder and father himself, Mr. Feiner's tale was inspired by his sons, Coby, Etai and Nate. "I often take the boys to construction sites, and they are fascinated by the machinery

and the building process," he says. The construction-themed book is narrated by a child and was written by Neil Crone with full-colour whimsical illustrations by Keith Nisbet. *National Post*



BY JACK KOHANE

If your curiosity is piqued to peek inside a home that's been in major design magazines, here's your chance. Among the seven select homes in this year's Cabbagetown Tours of Homes, 113 Amelia St. is a must-see, one merging modern design and heritage preservation with brilliant results.

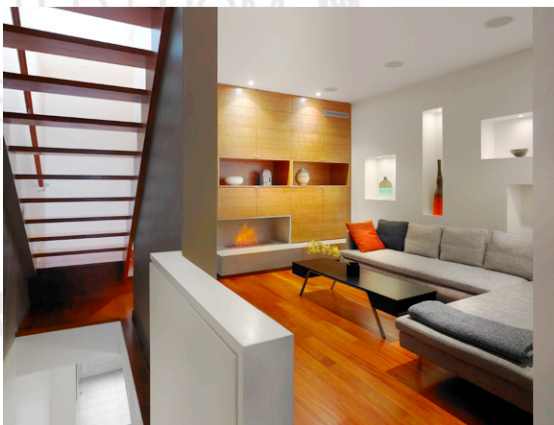
A string of people have stayed here since the house was built in the 1890s. "Clearly, there were lots of renovations," says Nick Foglia, who, with his partner, is the current homeowner. He says one part of the structure was fixed up by someone and then stopped; at a later date someone else continued but in an amateurish way. Described by Mr. Foglia, this was a "patchwork of DIY disasters."

Purchasing the property in 2001, the couple spent several years abiding by its idiosyncrasies before deciding to dive into their own redo.

"We wanted to see how the space worked, or didn't work for us before making any changes," recalls Mr. Foglia, a manager with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. "We did our homework, studied books, magazines and searched the Internet to get home-design ideas."

Cabbagetown homes may be prime downtown real estate, but owners must also consider the preservation aspects of their homes to maintain the 1800s flavour of the streetscape.

Located near Riverdale Park, Mr. Foglia's home is a fine example of a Victorian-era semi-detached rowhouse built to house workers for a local factory, long since razed. The front yard is small, a brick facade climbs to a peaked gable, and



to a tiny garden. The southern exposure allows for solar gain in frigid months, while taking advantage of tree canopies for shade and privacy in the summer.

A 235-sq.-ft. kitchen is the home's hub. An exemplar of space efficiency, the kitchen's Volakas marble island has a built-in Jenn-Air gas range and side grill, with drawers below the countertop for stocking cooking utensils at the ready. Clean-lined cabinetry is of white laminate trimmed with stainless steel handles, which are mirrored by brushed steel appliances. Sliding glass doors surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows lead to a cedar deck furnished with a rattan sectional sofa and club chairs.

More delights are waiting the higher you go in this house. On the second floor, there's a sunlit-drenched library at the rear; at the front, there's a guest bedroom with adjacent washroom clad in marble floor tiles and a black slate countertop vanity.

Bridging these spaces is the entertainment room, where Ms. Dubbeldam's design intelligence is most evident. Mr. Foglia says this was formerly a cramped bedroom and dim hallway. "We were unsure how to utilize the area, but Heather came up with the right plan to create a cozy lounge." In addition to the wall-mounted big-screen TV, there's a series of built-in wall niches under soft lighting to display a colourful collection of glass and ceramic pieces, including a dramatic double-headed African tribal mask. Wood cabinetry cloaks the cache of cords networking both TV and video components, and the electronic system piping music throughout the house.

Ascend to the *pièce de résistance*, one sure to elicit many cov-

CTOR VICTORIA

Like what you see? This spectacular rowhouse on Amelia Street is just one part of tomorrow's Cabbagetown Tour of Homes

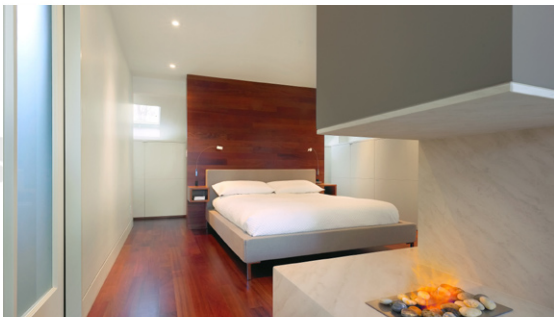
though narrow (just 16 feet at its widest), its interior is an ample 2,360 square feet.

In 2006, the couple set out in search of an architect qualified to work through the quirks of a century-plus property. Especially so in Cabbagetown, much of it designated a Heritage Conservation District. Even its back lanes sport names with historical significance: Goatsbeard Lane, named after the biennial wildflower that grows locally, and Magie Lane in memory of the late magician Doug Henning (his residence was at 94 Winchester St.).

Upon referral to Toronto architect Heather Dubbeldam, the couple viewed several of her residential projects to see her design approach. They were impressed and met to talk. "She understood our vision," Mr. Foglia says. The redo may have started as a kitchen makeover, but it quickly morphed into much more. "We decided to gut the house and start fresh," Mr. Foglia says. "Ours was a fixer-upper with history worth preserving, but also lots to demolish."

Renting a condo for six months, the couple kept close to the project and in constant communication with the architect and contractor, John Troke. "No way we could have stayed with this work going on around us," Mr. Foglia says. "But the results were worth the wait."

Like a spine, the restored staircase made of polished jatoba treads connects the home's three storeys. Once boxy rooms on each floor have had walls removed for an open feel and for unhindered flow through the tight confines. A long skylight above an open-riser staircase washes the interior in



etous glances: the top floor.

Originally an airless attic, later converted to an ill-lit and ill-heated artist's workspace with a walkout to a dilapidated deck, Mr. Foglia delights in showing its transformation into a sassy and sleek master and ensuite.

At the north side is the 300-sq.-ft. bedroom, its jatoba flooring coursing up one wall of the master suite to form a massive headboard that also works as a freestanding wall for the walk-through closet. The edge delineating master and ensuite is an open-sided Lexus gel-burning fireplace.

The 150-sq.-ft. ensuite at the south end is reclaimed area from the old deck, enclosed by walls sheathed in heated limestone tiles. The showerhead above the step-down bathtub is a spout that channels water down from the ceiling. "A major headache for the plumber to install, but a bliss to bathe in," Mr. Foglia says.

Also taking pleasure in pointing out that the house and the architect won the top prize at the 2008 Design Exchange Awards for Interior Design in the residential category, Mr. Foglia says, "We've managed to keep the traditional and modern elements in balance."

Asked why he thinks home tours are popular, Mr. Foglia says, "The appeal of Cabbagetown homes always draws people. They see well-maintained facades and are naturally curious about what's behind the doors. Entering is like taking a step back in time."

The annual self-guided tour, in its 32nd year, is on tomorrow from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and is coordinated by the volunteer staffers of the Cabbagetown Preserva-