

# THE VANCOUVER SUN

## WESTCOAST HOMES

### Less is more view for Kits custom home

Georgie finalist in the small detached home category believes quality over quantity

**Kim Pemberton**

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You know your house is something special when you come home to find tourists taking photos of it or artists asking permission to sketch it.

Both have happened at the contemporary residence, owned by Michael and Diane Seear, which is located on what has to be one of the best addresses in Kitsilano -- 1952 Ogden Ave. -- a quiet, short street overlooking English Bay with unobstructed views of the West End and the North Shore Mountains.

The Seear home, designed by architect Frits de Vries and built by Boda Construction, was one of the five finalists in this year's Georgie's Awards in the best single detached family home under 2,000 square feet. "I love everything about the house," says Diane, as she relaxes on a comfy bay window perch with her Pekinese cross-poodles Soda and Fozzy.

"This is a dream come true. I used to come by this street as a teenager and think that is where I would want to live."

It's ironic that more than three decades later Diane, 51, now hears similar comments from passersby.

"People stop all the time. I saw a guy taking pictures and when I got closer I found his wife sitting on a bench in our yard," laughs Diane.



*Diane Seear sits on the window seat of her custom-built home with her dogs.*

CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun



*Master bedroom with space for a small office & a deck with a view overlooking English Bay.*

CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

"Another time I heard some guy say they must pay \$4,000 in (city) taxes. I popped up from behind a bush (where she was gardening) and said 'try more like \$14,000.'"

Diane says she still can't get over the costs, having lived a simpler life for years in Coquitlam with her first husband. While that home in the suburbs was double the size it wasn't nearly as functional and obviously didn't enjoy panoramic views or have a \$2.4-million price tag.

"We really live in this house," says Diane, pointing out her favourite spot in the house -- the huge kitchen and the nearby open concept living/dining space.

Because Diane loves to cook, the attention to detail in the kitchen is extensive. The home also boasts custom-designed bookcases on nearly every main wall to contain Michael's collection. Michael, 54, is a doctor at Children's Hospital, who is busy these days preparing for a second medical mission to Sri Lanka.

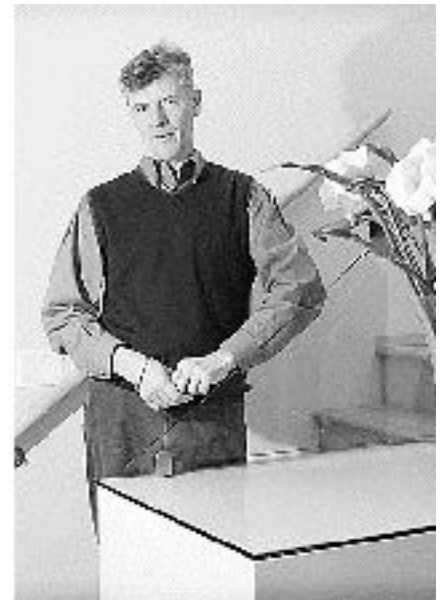
By having the house custom-built, at a cost of \$600,000, the home meets all of the couple's needs, despite it's relatively small size, compared to other multi-million dollar properties in Vancouver.

This "empty-nest" couple, who have three grown children each from previous marriages, also have a comfortable place for their children or friends to stay when they visit. The house, built at grade, has large windows in the downstairs suite to take full advantage of the view.

The Seears chose de Vries as their architect after he was recommended by an interior designer friend, and Diane credits him for steering her in the right direction when it came time to choose finishing details.

"Frits is a high-end kind of guy. I'm from Coquitlam. I'm used to going to Home Depot but once you start (selecting upper-end products) you can't stop. You can really tell the difference in the end," she says.

De Vries has run a small but busy firm (with about a dozen projects on the go at any one time) in Vancouver since 1985. The firm is well-known for having designed



*Architect Frits de Vries has been practising in Vancouver for 15 years and won a Georgie for Seear house.*

CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun



*Diane Seear had a large kitchen designed to accommodate her love of cooking.*

CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

Sooke Harbour House on Vancouver Island and many other notable private residences and retail boutiques.

In designing the Seear residence de Vries found that "sometimes less can be more."

While the zoning would have allowed a 25-per-cent-density bonus to be developed on the compact lot, the couple chose instead to build small. This meant their beach and North Shore mountain views were not compromised and they would not lose their extra parking space. Michael, an avid gardener, also has room for a greenhouse in the back yard.

"I'm all for small houses. It's better to build smaller with a higher quality," says de Vries.

The architect's goal then was to achieve the best utilization of views, light and space within the 33-by-110 foot south facing lot.

This contemporary home is built in a neighbourhood where traditional homes predominate, but yet it does not look out of character.

"In general it's more difficult to do a contemporary house in Vancouver," says de Vries.

"The majority of houses -- nine out of 10 -- are built in a traditional style. In R5 neighbourhoods the city promotes traditional design. . . . officially they (city planners) don't tell you it has to be traditional but it seems these designs are easier to get accepted. If you do more of what is common it's definitely easier."

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*House built in a contemporary style in a neighbourhood with predominantly traditional homes.*



CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

*Open concept living/dining area features extensive maple millwork and maple flooring.*