



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ♦ FOUNDED 1844

Globe Real Estate

For serial builders, third time lucky

After two earlier successes, a couple in West Vancouver teamed up with architect Frits de Vries for a new dream home that has already been short-listed for two architectural design awards.

Alexis Roohani

Friday, July 21, 2006

In a way, the story of Keenan and Tammy Dom is one we've heard before. The husband and wife tag-team — he, a geologist turned contractor; she, a registered nurse with a keen interest in interior design — have designed and built their own dream home.

A portrait of West Coast contemporary warmth and refinement, the current Dom residence is nestled off a winding spill of West Vancouver road that pools, eventually, in a cul-de-sac known as Seaside Place.

From its cliff-top roost, the house overlooks the panorama of Lighthouse Park, the Gulf Islands, and the miles of ocean situated in between.

What is most remarkable about the Dom residence is not so much the success of the project, but that it is only the most recent of such endeavours for the couple.

Preceded by a renovated cottage in Old Caulfield and a craftsman-style home that began as a vacant lot near Eagleridge Bluffs, Seaside Place is the third dream home the Doms have managed to catch in their net.



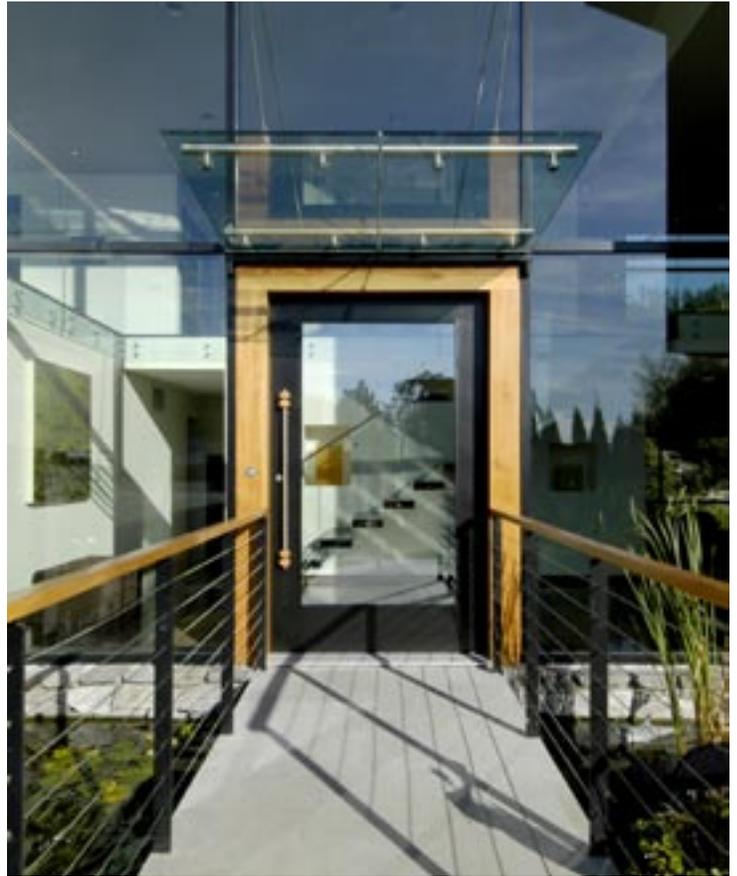
The seaside residence of Keenan and Tammy Dom, designed by architect Frits de Vries, was short-listed for a 2005 Canadian Home Builders Award and a 2006 Architectural Institute of British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor's Award for Excellence.



Ms. Dom is quick to clarify the motivations behind their real estate track record. "We're not about flipping houses. People who know nothing about building or real estate will buy a place just to turn around and sell it. They have no passion for it; it's just about money."

The Doms' motivations seem to come from a purer place. "My passion is interior design," explains Ms. Dom. "I just eat house and home magazines, piece-by-piece, word-by-word. When we do build a house, I go to the architect with a folder full of all the ideas that I want, and then rely on them to draft it up for me. It's like being an artist in a sense."

Leaving his wife to take the design bull by the horns, Mr. Dom finds satisfaction in managing the technical and engineering challenges of the actual construction, a task whose burden is mediated by the fact that, unlike his client-controlled commercial contracts, the homes are completed entirely under his own direction.



"It just comes down to a smoother, more consistent project," he says of having hired and directed his own crew for the building of the couple's last two homes. Mr. Dom's insider knowledge translates to a clever allocation of funds, which is ultimately what allows the couple to build the house they want. "We don't really build by budget. I know what's going to be really expensive and moderately expensive, so I keep the project on a leash in that regard. But if it has to be to make the house look good, then we're going to do it."

By the time brainstorming had begun for Seaside Place, the dream that the Doms were following had evolved away from the traditional styles of their previous homes toward a more modern look and feel. With this new vision in mind, Mr. Dom took his wife to view a residential work in progress by Vancouver architect Frits de Vries.

"We loved the contemporary look he was doing and the design of the roof-line," says Ms. Dom of the V-shaped butterfly roof that eventually landed atop Seaside Place. Satisfied that Mr. de Vries possessed the skill and vision necessary to bring their dream to life, the Doms went knocking on the door of the architect's Kitsilano office — Ms. Dom's trusty folder of ideas in-hand. With Mr. de Vries help, what began as the rough sketches of a floor plan became an elegant residence that has been short-listed for two architectural design awards since its completion in 2004.

"One of the things that's most successful about the house is the way you walk in, and the way the house presents itself," Mr. de Vries explains. "It's a whole entry sequence. Both Keenan and Tammey were clear about this



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being a main feature of the home."

A level footbridge leads from the front yard over a small lily pond and past a sheet of waterfall to the home's threshold. The oversized glass front door, outlined by concentric frames of black aluminum and clear fir, is encased in a sleek façade of curtain wall glazing the reaches to the front peak of the butterfly roof.

Beyond the entrance, the liquid finish of Brazilian cherrywood floors leads the eye in two directions: toward the back of the home and out a parallel section of glass walling to the craggy

surface of cliffs across the bay; or upward along the profile of a cantilevered staircase to where the edges of the second floor kitchen and living spaces spill through glass panel railings.

The proportions of the space are impressive, yet maintain an air of the understated. Earth and water hues reflected in the furnishings, accent tiling, and minimal décor mimic the natural tones of the home's walnut millwork, wood flooring, and stained cedar and basalt exterior.

The result is a vision of grandeur that flows with the simplicity of its wooded backdrop.

Thanks to Mr. de Vries skillful planning of the double glass walls on opposite ends of the home, the site's dual views have been realized to their full potential, and can be enjoyed simultaneously from the hub of the kitchen on the second floor. Facing west, glimpses of open ocean play peek-a-boo from between neighbouring rooftops as the slow descent of afternoon sun floods the kitchen, living room, and front deck with rosy warmth. Opposite this

canvas, the rear wall of the home captures the southeast vista of Vancouver Island, Kitsilano, and, 200 feet below, the crash of water into the bay beside the family's fire pit deck.

"I absolutely love this house," gushes Ms. Dom. The third house, it would appear, has been a charm for the couple.

And yet, the couple has just recently put Seaside Place on the market, begging the question of what would motivate them to leave this modern dreamscape behind.

Mr. de Vries perhaps sums it up best: "They just like the process of finding a new project."

Though they will eventually part ways with their seaside paradise, the Doms will be taking the inspiration behind the dream with them. "I want to create a house I love and that has my personal touch," explains Ms. Dom. "I know more people are apt to buy craftsman style than they are contemporary, but I'm not going to do what the market is driven by right now. I'll do contemporary again."

