

Local, green mindset driving home renos

Tracy Tong, Metro Ottawa (www.metronews.ca)
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It's not news that more people are turning to condo apartments and townhouses as an urban living solution.

Then it should also be no surprise that people are looking to designers for advice on how to maximize their space.

"There's a demonstrable trend of people taking more interest in core neighbourhoods," said Chris Straka, the owner of Ottawa-based Vert Design. "And there's a reason why neighbourhoods like the Golden Triangle, Centretown, the Glebe, Westboro, Hintonburg and New Edinburgh are popular — people see the value of being able to walk to the coffee shop and local park."

Small spaces create a need for people to make more of the space they have, he said. And in many cases, that means blurring the line between indoor and outdoor spaces.

"Outdoor kitchens have been going through the roof for several years. You can pull the wall back and have indoor living space flow into the outdoor living space — and increase your living space for two or three more months a year."

This weekend, Vert Design will be exhibiting and hosting seminars at the Ottawa Home and Garden Show, and will specifically be talking about green design and how people can apply principles to outdoor and indoor projects.

While the company is seeing more people wanting to bring their indoor spaces outdoors, another growing outdoor trend is green roofs.

"There are lots of benefits to them. They create habitat for small animals, they can look beautiful, they can increase the lifespan of a roof membrane and they can add insulation value to the home," said Straka.

In terms of materials, people have been going back to natural, he said.

"People aren't interested in buying something that pretends to be something it isn't," he said. "If a client want siding on a house that has the look and warmth of wood, they ask for wood," he said. "And fake plants — forget about it. Nobody wants something that is artificial. They want the real thing."

When it comes to plants, many people are taking it one step further.

"More and more people are interested in local sourcing," he said. There are advantages to this — a garden that is native to the area has a higher survival rate because the plants are adapted to the environment.

"People are interested in greener futures," said Straka. "Green design for individual tastes with communal benefits."