

Unusual homes, unusual thinking

Rules get thrown out for these very distinct and unique properties.

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Special to The Star

It was in 2003 that interior designer Elaine Cecconi found her dream lot.

It was more than a little unconventional: There was a haphazard house sort of tacked on to the back of a semi on Dundas St. W., but it sat on a good-sized chunk of property, albeit landlocked by laneways.

"I did everything that I tell my clients not to do," says Cecconi, one half of upscale design firm Cecconi Simone, along with Anna Simone.

Cecconi is planning to put her unusual home – a high-design, 4,000 square-foot oasis in the middle of Brockton Village – on the market this spring.

The house stands, Cecconi concedes, on the "less notable" side of Dufferin. "Construction took two years, because I had to go before a committee of adjustments. Then I delayed to get hold of a piece of land someone bought at a city auction. But it allowed me to build at the back of the property with these beautiful southern exposures."

If 6A Brockton Ave. were at Summerhill Ave. and Yonge St., it would be worth more than \$2 million the property will likely be listed at, says Paul Johnston, a sales representative who specializes in unique urban homes in the city of Toronto.

"But still, price comparisons with other homes in the area are also out whack," he adds.

Johnston defines unusual homes as being "of notable style, architecture or location," but do not appeal to everyone.

"This is never an exercise in square footage. The usual benchmarks – number of bedrooms, bathrooms lot size and the all-important question of location – are up in the air."

These unique homes do fetch a premium. "Judging exactly what that is... that's the secret sauce," says Johnston.

There is a catch, he adds. "They definitely stay on the market longer. But - then again - not always. We do many deals between clients that never hit the market. It is very particular. We just sold (art photographer) Ed Burtynsky a home; it looks like a classic Victorian on the outside, but, inside... WOW!"

A secret element is key to the unusual home market. The pizza-delivery guy has trouble finding Cecconi's home. "I sit on the roof deck and watch friends drive up and turn away, because they can't see the home, or they can't imagine a home of this scale where it is," she says.

Johnston recently sold a glass house in the Beaches, on Alfresco Lane, for just under \$2 million. "This is a house you could put anywhere in the world near any body of water."

"It is also of reasonable size, no monster, at 2,000 square feet. It completely embraces its surroundings."

Johnston maintains that the market for these homes is worthwhile. "When I first started another agent said to me, 'You are a dork,' because I was choosing challenging places. But it is not about the places, it is about the clients!"



With its modern design and 4,000 square feet of space, this home is an oasis in the middle of Toronto's west-side Brockton Village.



This Ossington-area laneway home sold for almost \$900,000.

"The kind of people attracted to unusual homes are the greatest; they are adventurous, creative individuals who take their time finding something bespoke. So much of what we desire as consumers these days is something special, something one-off, by a small producer, artisanal, something with provenance," he says.

Johnston recently sold a Grove Avenue home, "a laneway house in every sense of the word; it's the only home on this laneway in the Ossington and Dundas Sts. Area."

"While on a small lot, the house itself is quite extraordinary, with windows on three sides and skylights



In the Beach, this glass house recently sold for almost \$2 million.

– light, airy, with an utterly distinctive floor plan. It has gone through just a handful of owners over the years, each of whom seem to have added on little bits – a second bedroom, in one instance, a rooftop deck in another, a gas fireplace in the living room most recently."

The place sold for about \$900,000. "It's all about surprise," says Johnston of the wedged-in home's appeal.

"First, you wouldn't expect to find this house on the laneway, and, second, the interior space and volumes are super-surprising, bright and airy."